



# Not All Glam

Entertainment lawyer Ashley Yeargan on her days interning for David E. Kelley and John Wells BY AMY WHITE



**Ashley Rose Yeargan**

RUSS AUGUST & KABAT

ENTERTAINMENT & SPORTS

LOS ANGELES

Limits on screen time were never a big thing in Ashley Yeargan’s family.

“I am the child of two people who embrace TV and film,” she says. “I spent every weekend of my childhood going to the movies with my parents; we still do that together. That’s our idea of family time.”

Back then, Yeargan’s favorite TV series included *The Golden Girls* and ABC’s “TGIF” shows like *Boy Meets World*, *Step by Step* and *Family Matters*. Then in sixth grade, she landed on the O.J. Simpson trial.

“I was obsessed,” Yeargan says. “I’d negotiate with my parents for trial time. They were like, ‘This is strange that our child wants to watch a murder trial.’ But they saw I was legitimately interested. I’d watch it hours each day.”

The trial got her thinking about the law as well as entertainment, and the two would meet-cute in 2003 when Yeargan was a sophomore at Yale. “There was a career posting from David E. Kelley Productions, which then had *The Practice* and *Boston Legal*,” she says. “They wanted an Ivy League student who had an interest in entertainment and law. I applied, thinking there was no way.”

She got the gig and spent that summer in Kelley’s production office. “David had in-house business and legal affairs departments, and part of the program was they arranged time for the interns with each of those executives,” she says. “This internship showed me there could be a unique space for me, that there’s an entire business behind the industry I loved, and that it had complex issues while being fun.”

She next scored a business-affairs internship with the production company of John Wells, who had both *ER* and *The West Wing* on the air. She remembers

visiting the various sets. “It was very cool,” she says, “but very educational. I had no concept of what goes into just a 10-second shot—how long it takes to set up the lighting and the staging and all the people that are involved in every capacity.” That knowledge has stayed with her. “In my practice, when we’re talking about interruption of production, I have a better

understanding of what that tangibly means. What does it mean when a show gets canceled? It means that 150 people are out of work.”

The internships helped define her focus. “Most of the executives had a law background, including the writers,” she says. “That reaffirmed my desire to go to law school.”

She narrowed it down to USC and Stanford. The latter was intriguing because Larry Stein, now of Russ August & Kabat, taught an entertainment law course there, and he’d become Yeargan’s friend and mentor since she saw him at an entertainment symposium.

“I called Larry and said, ‘I got into Stanford, but I think I’m going to go to USC so I can take your class.’ And he said, ‘Are you out of your mind? Go to Stanford; you can work for me and I’ll teach you whatever I taught in the USC class.’”

Yeargan likes the boutique vibe at Russ August & Kabat. “The big firms repped the studios, record companies and media conglomerates, whereas I was really interested in the John Wellses and David Kelleys of the world—the creators and owners of content and ideas,” Yeargan says.

When she started practicing law in 2008, a client, Tokyo Broadcasting System, was claiming that the ABC series *Wipeout* infringed on original programming formats for six of its shows, including *Ninja Warrior*.

“The legal theory was that the structure of a television show is entitled to IP protection,” Yeargan says. “There’s a whole emerging area, and this case was seminal in it. It was formative in terms of developing my practice. Our case basically said that the selection and arrangement of various elements in our client’s shows—including architectural renderings and voice-overs—is copyrightable expression and had been infringed by *Wipeout*. When you watched the shows side by side, it was remarkable.”

The successful settlement led to an enduring relationship. “This is now a long-standing client,” she says.

Yeargan knows what friends hear when she says *entertainment lawyer*. “I constantly have to remind them that it’s not all glam, movie premieres and concerts,” she says. “It’s a lot of hard work.” **SL**



OK, some glam: Yeargan’s badge from playing an extra on *ER*.