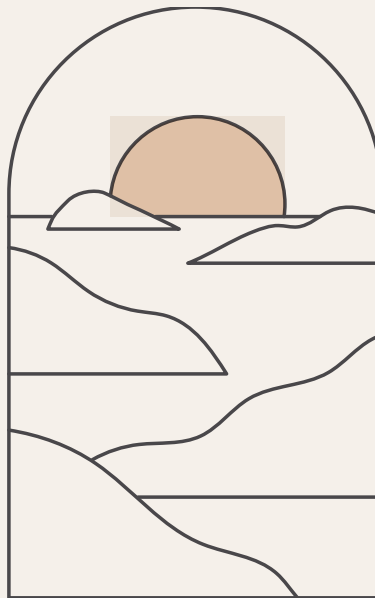
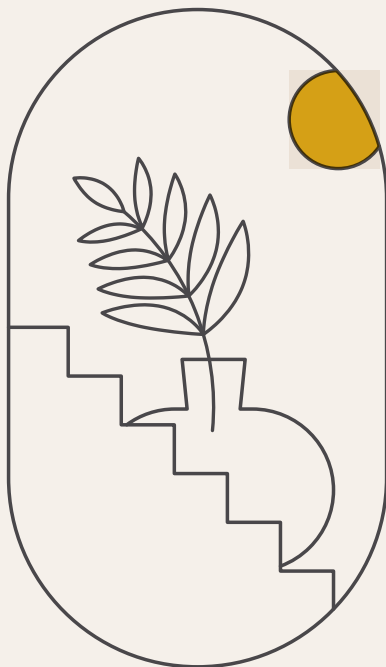
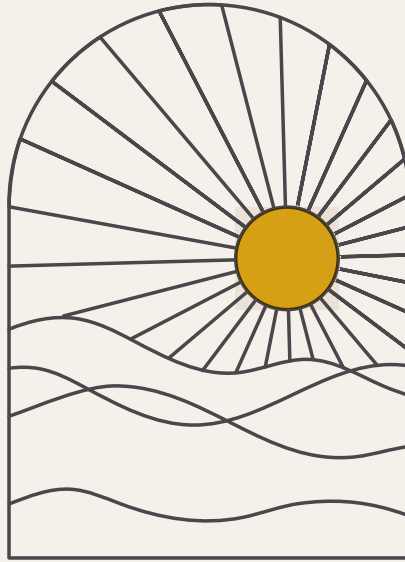
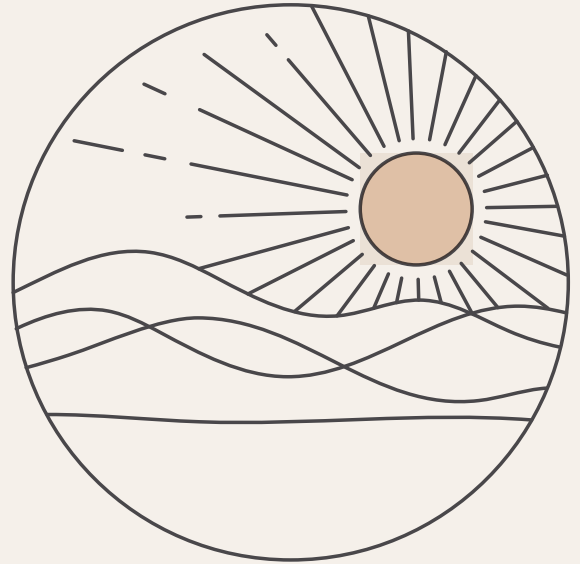
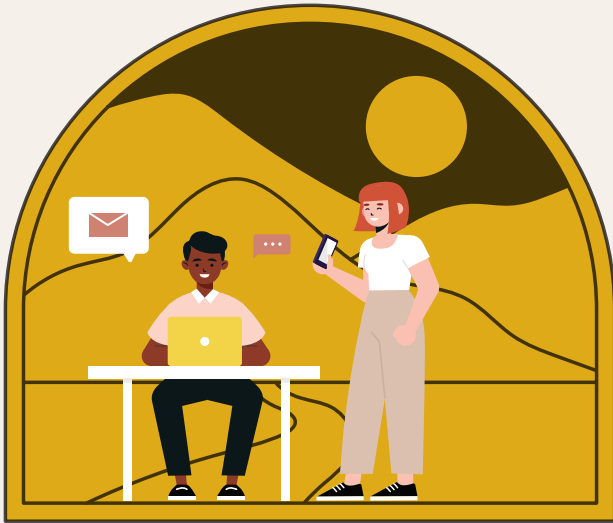


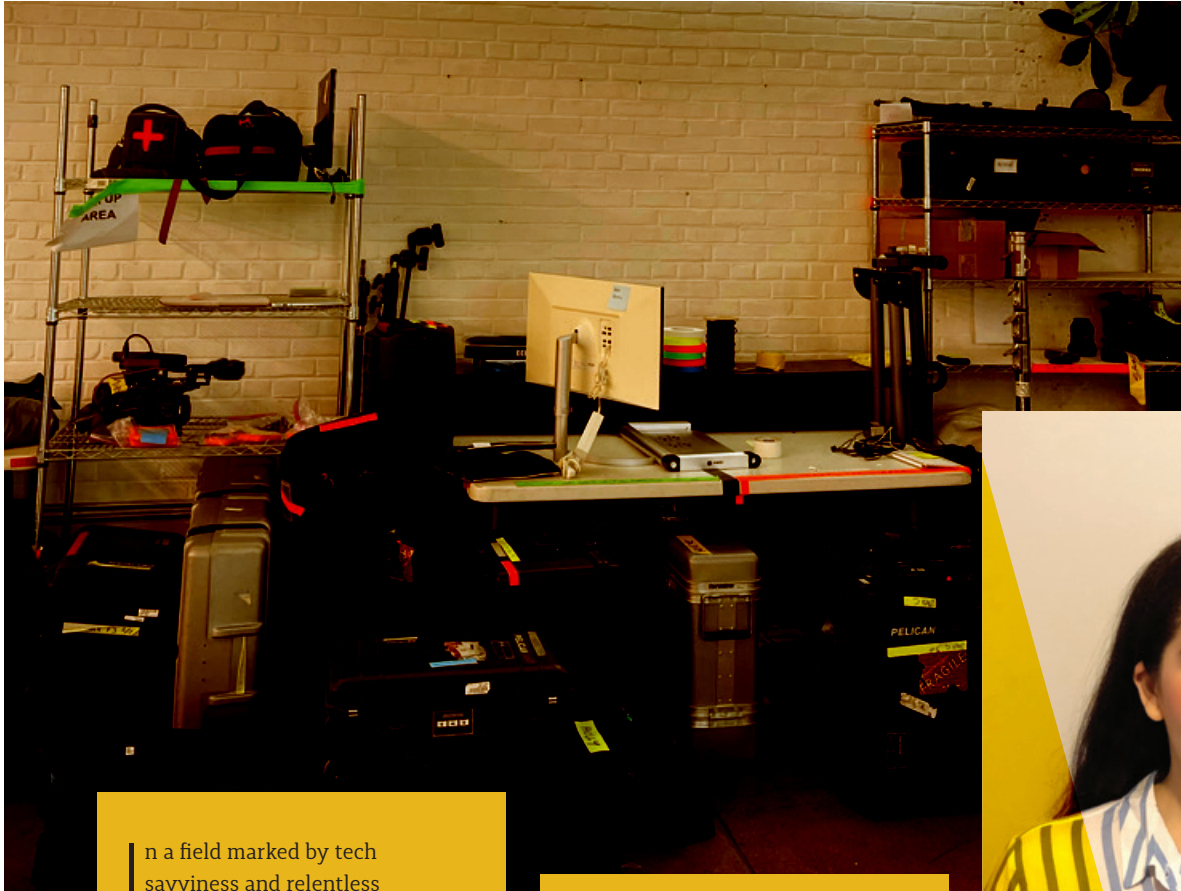
The Power of POSTPRODUCTION



MEGAN MASCENA GASPAR, BIANCA AHMADI AND JACOB MULLEN
UNPACK THEIR POSTPRODUCTION CAREERS—FROM HUMBLE
BEGINNINGS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND.

WRITTEN BY SARA MERICAN





Bianca Ahmadi (below) starts the postproduction process once footage is dropped off.



In a field marked by tech savviness and relentless innovation, postproduction was uniquely suited to adapt to the seismic shifts and challenges of the last two years. Postproduction professionals Megan Mascena Gaspar, Bianca Ahmadi and Jacob Mullen share their unexpected journeys into the edit room and weigh in on how the space has transformed over the course of their careers.

"Postproduction needs to be demystified a little bit," postproduction supervisor Ahmadi says. She oversaw *The Source*, an eight-film documentary series for Vice World News. One of the films, *The Shockwave*, which spotlights the Beirut port explosion, earned a prestigious Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award earlier this year.

She adds, "Sometimes people may think about (postproduction) in terms of how it was before the pandemic and don't really acknowledge all the shifts that have happened."

NAVIGATING THE SHIFTS

The massive shifts in postproduction have come not just in technology and software, but also in how people organize themselves and work together. Ahmadi emphasized the rising importance of good leadership from post producers and postproduction supervisors, especially when team members are no longer just a holler down a physical office hallway.

Beyond technological competencies, the ability to manage a remote team—set realistic deliverables, build a healthy working culture and keep the big-picture creative goal in mind—has become the defining feature of Ahmadi's job. She has also found her international experience especially useful in her recent documentary project for Vice, gained through time working in human rights in Brazil and studying in Hungary. "As a post supervisor,

you're finding the editors, leading the team, making sure that we're on schedule, delivering everything for films on different schedules from all over the world."

This is a far cry from how postproduction looked like when Ahmadi started more than 15 years ago.

"Everyone was in the office, and you had editors that you could hire locally. Now, you can hire anyone if you like their work," shares Ahmadi, pointing out that she has hired editors in New Zealand, Spain, New York and Los Angeles. "Just because you live somewhere doesn't mean the postproduction process has to stick to that strictly."

Gaspar has worked on major scripted series like *Speechless*,

Fresh Off the Boat and *JAG* in her decades-long career. She has adapted to the technological upheavals and cultural shifts in the industry. The first show she worked in postproduction was “one of the last shows which used a full orchestra to score,” yet also one of the first shows to go high-definition.

Regarding the transition to remote work, Gaspar shares that her team was well prepared: “We have been doing semi-remote mix playbacks for years for our executive producers who couldn’t leave the lot.” She is working on *Doogie Kamealoha, M.D.* and *The Wonder Years* currently, crediting platforms like Evercast for making postproduction collaboration easier. She has also organized virtual team-building events like cheese taste-offs to promote rapport. On postproduction teams now working from home, Gaspar says, “I just didn’t think it would work, but it can—and some people are now really used to it.”

Mullen has also adapted in this new landscape. Previously working on shows like FX’s *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and AMC’s *The Walking Dead: Origins*, he participated in one of the most unique episodes of television he has ever worked on during the quarantine days of the pandemic.

He served as a postproduction supervisor for Apple TV+’s *Mythic Quest* when all the productions in Los Angeles came to a grinding halt. Showrunner Rob McElhenney got together with the writing team and created a “Mythic Quest: Quarantine” episode and pitched it to Apple and Lionsgate. With enthusiastic approval from both, Mullen’s team formulated a plan to shoot remotely via Zoom and entirely on iPhones. Apple shipped out nearly 50 iPhones for the production, along with microphones and lighting setups.

The camera lens faced the talent, while the team monitored the shoot through a “video village” assembled via Zoom. “We shot, edited and finished an episode of television entirely on the iPhone from our homes during a pandemic,” Mullen shares. “It was an exhilarating experience.”

WINDING PATHS

Working in postproduction was not something that Gaspar, Ahmadi or Mullen had thought about at the beginning of their careers.

Hearing about a job in production accounting while at Emerson College, Gaspar jumped at the opportunity to land her first postgraduation job in Los Angeles even though her original goal was to work in production. “I quickly learned that I wasn’t made for set work. I didn’t like having to be quiet,” shares Gaspar.

She held assistant coordinator roles in various departments for *JAG* until a role in postproduction opened up during *JAG*’s fourth season. “I had no idea what post people did, but I wanted to stay with the show,” Gaspar says. She asked for the position and has stuck to postproduction ever since.

Gaspar enjoyed supervising “big VFX” and worked with aircraft carriers, planes, army bases and explosions. “But my favorite place to be is on the mix stage, working with all the pieces, dissecting sound effects, working to make a line of dialogue sound better, massaging a score cue,” she shares. “That is where I come alive.”

After leaving a year-long sales job in Houston to move to Los Angeles, Mullen rode waves of rejections before landing a role as a runner with a postproduction facility in Culver City. He eventually connected via LinkedIn with *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* producer Jeff Luini. After much persistence from Mullen, Luini brought him in to work on a pilot.

“The *Sunny* post team is like my second family. They are also the *Mythic Quest* post team, so we have been in the trenches together for some time now,” shares Mullen, reflecting on his decision to stay long-term on a handful of shows rather than hop around on different projects. “If I take on a pilot or something new, I bring the team along. Having trust in your department is crucial to success. It makes things dramatically easier and more fun when you operate with the same crew show after show.”

Unlike Gaspar and Mullen, who felt the pull to head out west to Los Angeles, Ahmadi was determined to find work in New York City. While working as a logger in San Francisco, she found a television editing role in New York. After a “very intense” few years working on several unscripted crime series, Ahmadi decided to move into the lifestyle space for a change in environment. “I want to look at homes and beaches,” she explains.

Now she finds herself taking on documentaries and video journalism for platforms like Vice World News and Discovery+. “I’ve always liked real stories,” Ahmadi shares. “I would say that now I’m actually doing what I’ve always wanted to do.” She knows that her years working in postproduction assistant and coordination roles, quietly observing the ins and outs of the industry, have given her a comprehensive understanding of postproduction.

“That whole trajectory was really helpful, because sometimes if you don’t do every piece, it’s like you skip a grade. You can’t make sense of why certain things are needed,” Ahmadi shares. “I was doing different positions until I got into a supervisory role.”



Jacob Mullen has worked postproduction on shows such as *Mythic Quest*, *The Walking Dead: Origins* and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (below)

If you get the title too quickly, you don't know all the different pieces that you need when you're at that level."

LEADERSHIP AND MENTORSHIP

What has kept Mullen, Ahmadi and Gaspar in postproduction is also the field's unique mix of technical, creative and leadership skills. Describing his job in great detail, Mullen points out that each studio and network requires different things from a postproducer.

Day-to-day, Mullen's role is to ensure that postproduction and production are on the same page. "I'm releasing memos, crew lists, scheduling any meetings and script coverage for post, writing down questions for production meetings, and getting acquainted with new faces," he shares. Month-to-month, he works on the credits process, tracks VFX shots, and schedules and supervises mixes and color sessions. "A lot of time goes into making sure we stay on schedule and under budget."

Gaspar was drawn to the opportunity to see a project through to its fruition. "In



postproduction, you are able to live with the story for its entire life," she says. She is able to peek in when a project is breathed into life at preproduction, then supervise the production process before shaping how the film is "rewritten" during postproduction. "There are few positions that have this gift."

Now as a senior leader in postproduction, Gaspar brings the philosophy of a "teaching hospital" to her team, which ensures that everyone is learning as much as possible. "I've had a few people come through my team who are now running their own shows, and that makes me so happy."

For example, Gaspar loops in her production assistant and other team members on emails that may not have direct relevance but will allow them to understand the bigger context of the show they are working on. "By seeing the emails and replies, the production assistant is able to understand what we're all working on, so we're able to feed her more stuff because she understands the process." Gaspar says that this is important for production assistants, because this is the time when "people open the doors" for them.

She also invites more staff to production and concept meetings. "My whole team goes, because those conversations are really important to learning how to make a show." Reflecting on her current role and desire to pay it forward, she shares, "I think it is really important for those who have had success to give back and mentor younger people." ■



Megan Mascena
Gaspar (right)
has worked in
postproduction on
numerous TV shows
including *New Girl*.



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