

Blueprint for the Future

WRITTEN BY MARA BROCK AKIL



This floor plan was created by set designer Matt Bekoff and the late production designer Wendell Johnson for the pilot of UPN's *Girlfriends*. This blueprint is a talisman representing the moment my career catapulted me into being the youngest Black showrunner of all time. Me, a young woman, trying to share what was in the hearts and minds of Black women living in LA in the year 2000. I wasn't trying to make history; I was just trying to get our story right.

In 2020, my career took another leap. I entered into a deal with Netflix. I always dreamed of having a great office like so many of my stylish characters had, but the world went remote. Maybe working from home over Zoom would be our future. But just as our characters need a place to say their lines and execute their action in order to change the hearts and minds of our audiences through laughter, tears, and myriad other emotions, we artists need a place to create new, inspired stories.

So I couldn't think of a better portrait to anchor my story²⁷ Productions offices than this beautiful patinated relic—my spotting plans for Joan's home, Joan's office and the *Girlfriends'* favorite hangout. There wouldn't be a *Forever* without the foundation of stories *Girlfriends* told 25 years ago. It wasn't just a TV show; it was a blueprint for my storied career as well as the first door so many craftsmen, artisans and performers walked through to live out their dreams. ■

Mara Brock Akil is executive producer and showrunner of Forever, and recipient of the 2026 PGA Norman Lear Achievement Award.