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BALANCING ACT Meriwether, navigating the Fox lot on her signature vehicle.

ELIZABETH MERIWETHER

The creator of *New Girl* spends days (and nights) writing jokes, wrangling stars and caring very little about Hollywood glamour

BY STINSON CARTER
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THERE'S A GIRL POWER PHENOMENON happening in Hollywood. As studio executives green-light a flurry of comedies by young writer/producers—such as Mindy Kaling of Fox's *Mindy Project* and Lena Dunham of HBO's *Girls*—Elizabeth Meriwether, the 31-year-old creator of the sitcom *New Girl*, has emerged as the most far-reaching talent among this new vanguard. Now in its second season, nothing has found the sweet spot of critical acclaim and high ratings quite so well as the Fox hit, whose fall premiere was the network's most-watched in a decade.

It's likely that viewers first tuned in owing to the appeal of lead actor Zooey Deschanel. But in its sophomore season, *New Girl* blossomed into the rare show that enjoys both a mainstream fan base and a cult following. What started as a standard post-*Friends* ensemble revolving around four Los Angeles roommates—and loosely based on Meriwether's own early 20s—has found its footing with a unique comic voice that borders on the absurd without feeling out of touch.

Raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Meriwether studied playwriting at Yale before moving to New York, where Fox (owned by News Corp., which publishes *WSJ. Magazine*) recruited her

through a writing workshop. *New Girl* was only the second pilot she had ever written, the kind of lightning-strike success that's virtually unheard of in the entertainment industry. As a showrunner, she serves as the executive producer while also overseeing all the daily elements of bringing the show from the writers' table to the screen.

Meriwether doubted whether she could helm a weekly show without any prior television experience but quickly adapted. "When you have to make a show every week, no matter what's going on in your life, you just figure out a way to make it happen," she says.

Making it happen, for Meriwether, means approving every wardrobe choice, making sure every joke lands and sitting with the editors for every cut. There's nothing resembling Hollywood glamour in her day, which often begins before dawn and stretches into the late hours—with food and showers an afterthought. But during those long spans at the writer's table and behind the camera, her quirky, unvarnished charm, easily recognizable to any viewer of the show, shines through—*New Girl* come to life.

3:30 a.m.
Wakes up

in her office on the Fox lot in West Los Angeles.

2

nights in a row

she spent sleeping in the office this week.

Liz's office essentials



11 vegan meals 5 bottles of dry shampoo, 1 bottle of Pepto-Bismol, 1 Con-Air hair dryer, 7 Ricola lozenges, 1 bottle of Advil, 1 can of pepper spray, TK black box, 1 case of Emergen-C, 1 Lady Speed Stick.

3

episodes

worked on—rewriting, drafting, watching edited cuts—before sunrise.



1

hour-long nap

before waking up at 7 a.m. and finalizing a script.

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Breakfast

Pecan steel-cut oats with mixed berries and vanilla bean tri-citrus salad. Liz eats none of it.

10 a.m.
Rides her pink Schwinn Lulu bicycle



across the lot from her office to the set.

4

scenes filmed

in the course of a 12-hour production day.



3

different inflections

that Liz asks Max Greenfield, the actor who plays Schmidt, to try for the punch-line phrase "sympathy vagina."



Lunch

Crispy hemp-seed cakes, spring onion and summer squash sauté and herb corn bread.



2
gifts

A dozen roses delivered to Liz's office by her parents and a dozen vegan cupcakes sent from a friend. (Liz is not actually a vegan.)

108
e-mails received

38
e-mails sent



3 p.m.

Leaves the set

to attend a table read for the Thanksgiving episode, which will feature Jamie Lee Curtis.



47

actors, producers and network executives present for the read-through.

33
pages

ripped through in only 30 minutes.

27

scenes of the Thanksgiving script discussed



Issues raised:

- Can we have an actor smash a can on his head?
- How can we get old pictures of Jamie Lee Curtis and Rob Reiner?
- How can we throw an eggplant off the roof of a loft in downtown L.A. without hitting traffic?



5 p.m.

New Girl Season 2

premieres on the East Coast. Cast and crew excitedly discuss that it's trending on Twitter.

0

tweets by Liz

during the premiere. But the next day, she writes: "Oh yeah, the premiere was last night—I should have tweeted about it. Damn it, I'm so bad at Twitter. Thanks for nice things you guys said."

5.07

million viewers

tune into the premiere.



22

'spirit animal' T-shirts

that Liz has given to members of the staff. Each person received a different breed of cat or dog, based on personality.

8:20 p.m.

Attends a viewing party downstairs to celebrate the Fox fall premiere of fellow Tuesday night comedy *Ben and Kate*.



On the menu

Delivery from Pizzeria Mozza, Babycakes vegan cupcakes.



9:38 p.m.

Heads upstairs to eat dinner

She orders delivery because the pizza ran out at the party.

12:30 a.m.

Leaves the viewing party and goes home to sleep.

(The next night will be spent back in her sleeping bag at the office.)

