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## Art Director Adam Rowe talks The Good Place fun facts and Season 4 secrets



by Victoria Davis 1 week ago

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*Adam Rowe says The Good Place was one of his most challenging and most rewarding projects. In this exclusive, the art director reveals fun facts about the show, favorite moments, and season 4 secrets.*

That's right, it's time for the **fourth and final round** of Michael's social, afterlife experiment. But this time—**spoiler alert**—Eleanor is in charge. **Adam Rowe**, the art director of seasons 3 and 4 of *The Good Place*, says NBC's comedic, vibrant, philosophical and mid twisting drama has been one of the most challenging projects he's ever been a part of. But it's also been one of his all-time favorites.

Having previously been a part of shows like *Criminal Minds*, *American Horror Story*, *Parks and Recreation* and the TV film special *Rent:Live*, Rowe has accumulate an

eclectic array of work experience in both death, the supernatural, absurd comedy and theatrical performance—*The Good Place* in a nutshell. Last year, Rowe was also nominated for an [Art Directors Guild Award](#) for the season 3 episode, “Janet(s).”

Rowe sat down to talk with Hidden Remote about his experience working on *The Good Place*, what went into developing the show’s Good Place, Bad Place, and Medium Place, lesser-known fun-facts about the show’s train and set development, as well as favorite moments from working with the crew.

Rowe also revealed some secrets about *The Good Place* season 4 and what fans can look forward to regarding the show’s ending.



**Hidden Remote: How did you end up working on *The Good Place*? What was it about the show that made you want to be a part of it?**

**Adam Rowe:** I was already familiar with the collective brain that made *The Good Place* very funny and Mike Schur is somebody who I respected since the first time working with him on *Parks and Recreation*.

Ian Phillips, who was the Production Designer on *Parks and Recreation* and eventually went on to *The Good Place* called and asked if I was interested. I leaped. I binge watched seasons 1 and 2 and became a fan of the show, not just because I was going to work on it, but because the show is great. It doesn't happen that often where you walk into a show as a fan. I came into that show just as starry-eyed as anybody.

**Hidden Remote: In relation to all these other projects that you've done—*Parks and Recreation*, *Dexter*, *Rent: Live*—what made *The Good Place* a unique project for you to be a part of?**

**Rowe:** Well, for whatever reason, I had a long-running record of doing crime drama, mostly dealing with dead bodies. So I went from working on shows like *Dexter*, *Criminal Minds* and *American Horror Story*, to then getting the opportunity to work on *The Good Place* season 3 which is all about people in the afterlife.

So there's this seven-year span where I'm looking up at the heavens like, "What kind of cruel joke are we putting on me?" But the most exciting part of *The Good Place* is that it's not the heaven or hell, or purgatory, that you think it is and we were living kind of in this incredibly bizarre paradox that is Mike Schur's mind. So,

we're constantly laughing and constantly making this world more dimensional or different. I really really enjoy that part.

**Hidden Remote:** *The Good Place* is definitely its own animal when it comes to the concept of death. How do you go about imagining a world like that?

**Rowe:** What was cool about it was that we were never portraying that universe like people fantasize it looks like. It was important that we never planted the show inside some religious-based afterlife. It needed to be an afterlife that was only in *The Good Place*, which was not really a place at all. We actually all saw it as the back lot of Universal. And that's really what it was.

If you think about the show's philosophy, we never really know what the "Good Place" or the "Bad Place" is. We, as the crew, were always on our toes too. When someone asks you to make a hotel in *Criminal Minds*, you already know what that should look like. But in *The Good Place*, we had to making things that were kind of outrageous, yet still related to people. Like, when the judge starts talking about the Inter-Dimensional Hole of Pancakes, we didn't know what that was either. But that's what made it fun.





**Hidden Remote:** It looked like you guys had a lot of fun with it. When you go into that universe, there's this endless stream of color and monsters and things that don't make any sense.

**Rowe:** I remember our visual effects guy, David Niednagel doing a mock up of that early on and it looks like either one person's nightmare or one person's vision and the rest of us just throwing darts at it to try and get it right. Even when the characters are back in the real world, our Australia isn't real either. We were constantly making fun of cliché Australia stuff, like when they go to the American

restaurant Cowboy Skyscraper, that's a juiced up version of us making fun of Outback Steakhouse. We had a blast.

**Hidden Remote: There's a lot to keep track of in this show. How did you guys go about mapping out the "Good Place," the "Bad Place," and everything else with all the reboots and back-and-forth visits between the afterlife and the real world?**

**Rowe:** For me, it was really important to stick to the rules that had been made. One of the reasons *Star Wars* works so well is because they have rules, and the framework of those worlds are not broken no matter what plot problem they get themselves into. So, we inherited certain things that were established before Ian and I got there, like the fact that the Bad Place looked like it came out of the Mad Men era in the 1950s, and the Good Place was basically like an idealized, ice-cream-colored, little Europe.

It was hard to stay in those rules sometimes because we wished with some scenes that we could make the scenery more exciting or more outrageous like the "IHOP" episode. But we had to honor what these worlds already were. But we did go crazy on the Bad Place door, the one that Shawn and his demon friends use to go to earth. We went a little more Mel Brooks on it, so to speak.



**RELATED STORY:** [Watch The Good Place Season 4, Episode 7 live online](#)

**Hidden Remote:** So, you had all these rules and guidelines to draw from, but did the show's season 3 or 4 pose any particularly difficult challenges for you as an art director?

**Rowe:** The part of this show that's really hard is that some people are paying really close attention, especially in season 4 with everyone back in the Good Place, and it gets really complicated. Fans who really know the world, we wanted to make sure



that we were doing it right for them, like making sure all the pieces of the Good Place were in the right place at the right time in conjunction with all the different timelines.

Even in season 3, we had to try really hard with this and it was difficult to get it right. We did make a few mistakes, but it's impossible to get it all right with so many reboots and so many flashbacks.

**Hidden Remote: Working with all the flashbacks last season, especially with Michael's resets, and also with season 4 where the characters have to go through the same story line over again, it must be exhausting.**

**Rowe:** Oh yeah. It sounds silly, but even just Flower Alley, which is only a 40-foot-long by 10-foot-wide alley...we don't always shoot there and when we have to go back to that lot, sometimes things have fallen apart since this lot and some of these props have been used since 1975. Signs fall down, scenery rots...so we have to run back through there and refresh the whole thing.

At the end of season 2, the crew didn't know if we were going back to the Good Place so they were happy just to wipe their hands of it and walk away. So when we came back to it later in season 3, Universal had let a TV show or commercial turn it into a Middle Eastern town. We spent a lot of mental energy restoring everything to look clean and crisp like it used to.

On top of that, we're constantly thinking things like, "Is this the right reboot?" or "Is this the right time Chidi came down these stairs?" Things like that. We also don't shoot the show in order and sometimes we're filming two scenes at the same time. It gets complicated very quickly and I learned to just breathe through it and treat it almost like a game.



**Hidden Remote: You were also recently nominated for the Art Directors Guild Award for The Good Place season 3 episode "Janet(s)."**

**Rowe:** That was exciting. We all were very proud of the work that we did in season 3 because it was always on the move with the cast being in Australia, then Budapest, then they were in Florida, and they were in heaven, then hell...we were always moving as a crew. So the reward of being nominated for "Janet (s)" was something I was even more proud of because we pulled off something that was very complicated on a budget.

**Hidden Remote: I imagine that wasn't an easy episode to do, not just because of the budget, but with Janet's void being a place we haven't really been to before and then you're factoring in all these characters that also become Janet.**

**Rowe:** If there was one episode of television that should have a documentary made out of it, it should've been that one. There's a lot of leg work that goes into planning all of those shots because of the incredible amount of visual effect augmentation. Not only that, but you also have an actress who's playing 13 of herself in one episode. The props department made little microphone stands with ping-pong balls on the top so that D'Arcy [Janet] would always be looking at the right eye level.

For anyone who's a fan of the show, I felt like that episode was a gift.



**Hidden Remote:** Would you say that was your favorite scene to work on, or do you have another that's a personal favorite?

**Rowe:** The episode where Tahani goes to Budapest to see her sister is really fun because that room originally had nothing in it. We made that museum inside an empty warehouse. We also had a really good time making her artwork.

Also, any scene with the train is a blast. It's a real train that we had to move in and it takes like a million people to get the track laid down, but any time the train came around I got excited because I knew that I got to work with something that was totally not what anybody else in the world was doing that day, moving an actual

locomotive. It's a famous train too. It's the same train from *West World* and *Wild Wild West* with Will Smith.

**Hidden Remote: And the show is now in its fourth season. Will this really be the last season of *The Good Place*? What can you tell us about what fans can look forward to?**

**Rowe:** Season 4 will be the end. The art department knew pretty early on that this was a show that would only go for so long. But as far as things to look forward to, Mike sure has such a great way of making things silly and there's always gonna be silly in it. Kristen Bell Ted Danson have really great chemistry and are very, very lovely to watch because they're funny and they're heart warming. There's a lot of good bonding that you're going to see between those two and others.

Some's T. V. shows get a lot of crap for the way they end. But I think that you will find yourself feeling a beautiful sense of completion with *The Good Place*. It has an ending that's just sweetly wonderful.





**Hidden Remote: You talked earlier about the show having rules and guidelines, were any rules broken in this new season?**

**Rowe:** The world really gets messed up and loses its formality. Like, Michael's character is a very straight-laced being and is very organized, and as Eleanor becomes more and more in charge, things start to release a little bit and you'll notice that the characters are getting more comfortable with being in the afterlife and being who they are in the afterlife. And that happens with the costumes and scenery too. Things aren't so formal anymore, mostly because, now, everyone's in on *The Good Place* joke.

**Hidden Remote:** With the show being in its last season, what's been your favorite part about working on this show? I know we've mentioned a lot of fun things already.

**Rowe:** Being back together with this team. They make a science out of making people laugh. I will always have a fond place in my heart for this show, mostly because people love it so much. And how much fun is it to work on something people love? It's a great feeling.

And knowing that we've left something that will be part of the back lot at universal for who knows how long, and knowing that there's a piece of something I've been a part of that will live on past the show's popularity, is really a cool feeling.

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Which episode or season of *The Good Place* is your favorite so far? What do you speculate is in store for Eleanor, Michael, Chidi and the rest of the gang? Leave your thoughts in the comments below!



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