

# To design the 'Loving' set, it helped to have grown up near the locations

Cristy Lytal



For production designer Chad Keith it wasn't a stretch to re-create 1950s and 1960s Virginia for the film "Loving."

"Growing up in the South, where things happen slower than the rest of the country, there are still places like that, that are around where my family grew up. So I just know what that period looked like," said Keith, who still lives in his hometown of Wilmington, N.C.

The film is based on the true story of the marriage between a black woman named Mildred Jeter and a white man named Richard Loving at a time when Virginia still had anti-miscegenation laws. The couple contested those laws

after being arrested for marrying, leading to the Supreme Court's unanimous 1967 decision that laws prohibiting interracial marriage are unconstitutional.



“Loving” marks Keith’s third collaboration with writer-director Jeff Nichols and several other cast and crew members — following 2011’s “Take Shelter” and 2016’s “Midnight Special.”

“We’ve all become like a family,” said Keith. “So the main thing that attracted me [to ‘Loving’] was every time Jeff sends me a script, I’ll do it. I don’t know what it’ll be about, but I’ll do it.”

### **What were your visual references for “Loving”?**

We had Nancy Buirski, who made the documentary “The Loving Story.” There were a lot of extra hard drives that she dumped in our laps, so it was invaluable information for us to use, of where they really lived and real footage and the photography from Grey Villet [for a Life magazine piece on them] and all that.

## **How did you find the locations?**

We went out multiple times before we even opened an office just to scour the whole radius around Richmond and where they lived. We scouted original houses they lived in, which was a crazy experience, but places get updated, so you have to weigh the pros and cons of that. But we shot in the original courtroom that they were tried in, which was pretty fascinating. The exterior jail that we used was the jail they were actually in. We had to re-create the interior.

## **Where was the location for Richard's childhood home?**

That was a plantation called the Berkeley Plantation. We just had to landscape it and built porches on it and redid the roof, repainted it, redid the inside.

## **Tell me about the garage where Richard worked on his cars.**

Well, my dad was an auto mechanic and was a jack-of-all-trades and would always just create and invent things in the backyard, and I was always fascinated by that. But he passed away, like, a year before we made the film. I actually went to his shop and drove down to North Carolina, because we were shooting in Virginia, and I loaded up a truck and basically dressed the majority of that set with things from my dad's garage. I knew right when I read that scene in the script that that's exactly what I was going to do: model it after my dad's.



### **Where did you get the period cars?**

You start out with local car clubs. People love to bring their cars out to films, because they get to stand around all day and talk about their cars. I mean, my dad has a lot of period cars too, and Southern men and their cars is a huge thing. It's a big part of the film, especially the racing scenes.

### **Where did you film the Lovings' row house?**

For the D.C. row house, a couple had bought it, and they were at a point where they hadn't started remodeling it yet. They were, like, "Whatever you do is going to help us." So we took out walls and made more space and did wallpaper and put down checkerboard flooring. And at the end of it, they wanted to leave a lot of it, which is pretty rare.

### **What are your favorite scenes?**

One of the favorite things to re-create was when they're watching TV and

Grey Villet's over and he takes that snap of them when Richard lays his head in Mildred's lap. This is an actual photograph from Life magazine, and we wanted to nail it. So we got the curtains, the lamps, the drape on the couch. That was just an incredible feeling when it all came together.

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