

INTERVIEW

As its title implies, NBC's sensationally successful Thursday night sitcom *Friends* revolves around the series' six principal young stars: Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer. But from day one, two supporting actors have been instrumental in securing the show's considerable gay following: Jane Sibbett (who plays Carol, former wife of Schwimmer's character, Ross) and Jessica Hecht (who plays Susan, Carol's current life partner).

In the *Friends* pilot, we learned that Carol left Ross for Susan. In the series' second episode, the couple announced Carol's pregnancy. At the end of last season, baby Ben was born. Since the show, now in its second season, boasts millions of loyal fans, Carol, Susan, Ross, Ben and the entire *Friends* gang make up one of the most visible nontraditional families in television history.

While Sibbett and Hecht's interpretation of Carol and Susan has been lauded by many (and has earned *Friends* a 1995 Media Award from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination), co-executive producer David Crane—the only gay member of the *Friends* creative team—maintains that there was no hidden agenda behind the characters' creation.

"I don't think we did it because we felt it was important, believe it or not," Crane says. "We didn't do it for political reasons. We did it because they seemed like two really interesting, fresh characters. We were looking for a really unusual and interesting situation for Ross to be in vis-à-vis his ex-wife. This presented the most exciting dynamic."

Things have progressed nicely for Carol and Susan in the 15 months they've been together. On the Jan. 18, 1996, episode of *Friends*, the couple had a commitment ceremony at which guest star Candace Gingrich officiated as minister.

"This seemed to be another wonderful step," says Crane of "The One with the Lesbian Wedding," written by Doty Abrams and directed by Tommy Schlamme. "It turned out to be a really wonderful episode to do because, I mean, I say we don't have a political agenda—and we don't—but still, I think we all felt really good about telling the story of these two women who love each other, and showing that their relationship is as valid as any of the heterosexual relationships on the show.... I'm pretty proud of it."

As for Sibbett and Hecht, Crane has nothing but high praise.

"We are so fortunate to have actresses as talented as Jane and Jessica," he says. "They're just wonderful.... Everybody loves them, and they seem to love doing the show."

Although the rest of this year's episodes remain unwritten, Crane promises we will see Carol and Susan at least twice more before season's end.

During an hour-long three-way conference call, Sibbett and Hecht—who have become very close thanks to their work on *Friends*—revealed what it's been like to play a same-sex couple on one of television's most popular sitcoms.

MORE THAN FRIENDS

Friends co-stars Jane Sibbett and Jessica Hecht tell what it's like to portray the hottest lesbian couple on TV

by Daniel Vaillancourt



From left: Jessica Hecht, Candace Gingrich and Jane Sibbett

Vaillancourt: Why don't you start by sharing your feelings about the creation of the wedding episode?

Sibbett: It was great fun to do. We cried, we laughed, we had a great time. It was just like a normal wedding.

Hecht: That was the coolest thing about it. All

the feelings we had just brought up our own weddings. The whole setup was pretty traditional once we came down to it; the way the actual ceremony took place, the reception. It was just really very

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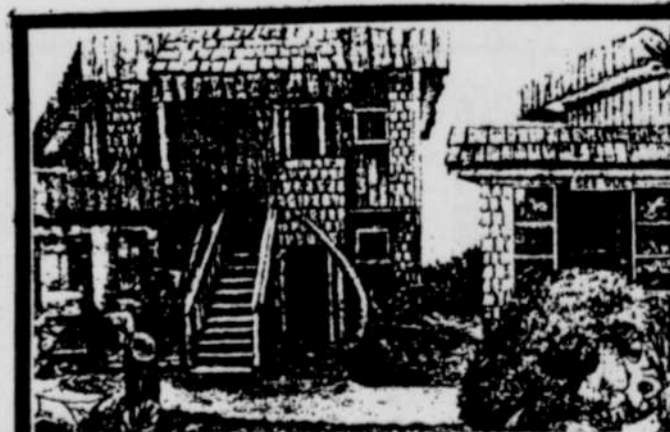
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