

= Pilot (Desperate Housewives) =

The pilot episode of the American dramedy @-@ mystery series Desperate Housewives premiered on October 3 , 2004 , on the ABC network . It was written by series creator Marc Cherry and directed by Charles McDougall . The pilot introduces the residents of the suburban neighborhood of Wisteria Lane . Following the suicide of an outwardly successful neighbor , her friends begin to deal with the problems in their personal lives . Susan Mayer (Teri Hatcher) competes for the attention of a new plumber who has moved across the street ; Bree Van de Kamp (Marcia Cross) struggles with her failing marriage and ungrateful family ; Gabrielle Solis (Eva Longoria) continues an affair with her sixteen @-@ year @-@ old gardener ; and Lynette Scavo (Felicity Huffman) copes with life as a stay @-@ at @-@ home mother of four .

Cherry conceived the idea for the series while watching coverage of the Andrea Yates murder trials , and was fascinated by how women lead lives of quiet desperation . He began writing the script in 2002 and pitched it to several networks throughout the following year . In October 2003 , ABC announced that it had picked up the pilot . Casting began in February 2004 and filming took place the following month primarily on the Colonial Street backlot set at Universal Studios . According to Nielsen ratings , the episode was watched by 21 @.@ 6 million viewers on its original American broadcast , becoming the most @-@ watched program of the week . The pilot received extremely positive reviews , with critics complimenting the series ' tonal diversity . The cast , particularly the four leads and Sheridan , also received praise . The episode won various awards , including three Emmys .

= = Plot = =

Desperate Housewives focuses on the lives of several residents of the fictitious street of Wisteria Lane . The suburban neighborhood is shocked by the suicide of Mary Alice Young (Brenda Strong) , who seems to have led an ideal domestic life . Mary Alice 's close friends , Susan Mayer (Teri Hatcher) , Lynette Scavo (Felicity Huffman) , Bree Van de Kamp (Marcia Cross) , and Gabrielle Solis (Eva Longoria) , struggle to come to terms with the news . Later , Mary Alice 's son , Zach (Cody Kasch) , awakens in the middle of the night to find his father , Paul (Mark Moses) , unearthing a mysterious chest from the drained swimming pool in their backyard .

Susan , a divorced mother , takes interest in Mike Delfino (James Denton) , a plumber who has recently moved to Wisteria Lane ; however , she faces competition with neighbor Edie Britt (Nicollette Sheridan) , a promiscuous serial divorcée . Suspicious that Mike is spending the night with Edie , Susan enters Edie 's home uninvited with the pretense of borrowing sugar . While inside , she accidentally knocks over a candle , which sets fire to the entire house . Susan flees the scene , leaving behind her glass measuring cup . Though wracked with guilt , Susan is relieved to learn that Mike was not the man with whom Edie was fornicating . Meanwhile , Lynette , a former career woman , is frustrated with raising four young children while her husband , Tom (Doug Savant) , is constantly away on business .

Bree , a perfectionist homemaker who feels unappreciated by her family , is troubled when her husband Rex (Steven Culp) asks for a divorce . She poisons him by mistakenly putting onions , to which he is deathly allergic , in his salad . At the hospital , Rex accuses Bree of being emotionally unavailable and obsessed with achieving domestic perfection . Elsewhere , Gabrielle , a former model , grows increasingly unhappy with her marriage to Carlos (Ricardo Antonio Chavira) , who buys her love with extravagant gifts . She continues an affair with her sixteen @-@ year @-@ old gardener , John Rowland (Jesse Metcalfe) .

Paul asks Susan , Lynette , Bree , and Gabrielle to sort through Mary Alice 's belongings , as he cannot bear to do so himself . In a box of Mary Alice 's clothes , the women discover a blackmail note reading " I know what you did [.] It makes me sick [.] I 'm going to tell [.] " The postmark indicates that Mary Alice received it the day she killed herself and the women begin to wonder what secret their friend could have been keeping .

= = Production = =

= = = Creation and development = = =

In 2002 , Marc Cherry was in a precarious financial situation and was having trouble finding a job . He commented , " I was broke , unable to get even an interview for a writing job , and seriously concerned about my future . I had just turned forty and was starting to wonder if I was one of those deluded writers that wander around Hollywood , convincing themselves they 're talented when all the evidence points to the contrary . " While watching television coverage of the Andrea Yates trials with his mother , Cherry turned to her and asked , " Can you imagine being so desperate that you would do that to your children ? " to which his mother replied , " I 've been there . " Cherry was intrigued by the idea that a " perfectly sane , rational woman could have the life she wanted , being a wife and mother ... and still have moments of insanity ; " he began writing the pilot episode soon after . Cherry originally developed the concept as a half @-@ hour comedy . However , after his agent was arrested for embezzlement , Cherry signed with Paradigm Talent Agency , where he was advised to rewrite the script as a soap opera . Cherry completed the first draft of the pilot in April 2002 and pitched the script to CBS , NBC , Fox , HBO , Showtime , and Lifetime , all of which turned it down .

Following script rewrites , Cherry pitched the series to ABC , who picked up the pilot . ABC executives were , however , concerned about the title of the series , which Cherry had selected before even writing the script . They suggested renaming the series Wisteria Lane or The Secret Lives of Housewives , but Cherry insisted on keeping the original title . He later commented , " I put ' desperate ' [into the title] to try to indicate , however subtly ... I 'm going to have some fun with the imagery , to take it to some interesting places . Most critics got the joke . Some people see the word ' housewives ' and it pushes a button in them and they seem to lose all reason . " The project was officially announced on October 23 , 2003 as a cross between American Beauty and Knots Landing . While Desperate Housewives , along with fellow new series Grey 's Anatomy and Lost , would later help reverse ABC 's flagging fortune , network executives Lloyd Braun and Susan Lyne were fired shortly after greenlighting these risky and expensive pilots .

= = = Casting = = =

Casting for Desperate Housewives began in February 2004 . Director Charles McDougall reported seeing around 150 " very good and determined women " audition for the four leads . Eva Longoria was the first actor cast in a lead role , landing the role of Gabrielle Solis , a materialistic ex @-@ model , after two auditions . Longoria , an unknown soap opera actress at the time , stated that prior to her audition , she had not read the entire script . She recounted , " Marc Cherry asks , ' So what did you think of the script ? ' like the whole thing . And I said , ' Well I didn 't read the script . I only read my part . ' And Marc Cherry goes , ' I knew you were Gabrielle at that moment because it was such a Gabrielle thing to say . ' " Roselyn Sánchez also auditioned for the role . Teri Hatcher was cast in the role of Susan Mayer , a single mother looking for love , after a second audition for ABC network executives . Cherry commended Hatcher 's audition , calling it " the best audition I 've ever seen in network [television] . " Actors originally considered for the role include Courteney Cox , Calista Flockhart , Mary @-@ Louise Parker , and Sela Ward . Julia Louis @-@ Dreyfus also expressed interest in the role , but network executives felt she was not right for the part .

Cherry offered the role of Bree Van de Kamp , a " perfect homemaker " reminiscent of The Stepford Wives , to Dana Delany three times . Delany rejected the role , as it was too similar to her character on Pasadena , but would later join the series in its fourth season as Katherine Mayfair . Marcia Cross was later cast as Bree . Roma Downey , Jeri Ryan , and Stacey Travis were also considered for the role , while Nicollette Sheridan auditioned for the part and was cast as neighborhood tramp Edie Britt instead . On her audition , Sheridan recalled , " At the end of the reading , the director looked at me and said , ' No , no , I see you as Edie . ' I said , ' Oh , I see , I come in a housewife

and mother of two and leave the slut . ' " The Edie character was originally intended to be a small role , but it was expanded once Sheridan was cast . Felicity Huffman was cast as Lynette Scavo , a frustrated stay @-@ at @-@ home mother of four , after talking about her own experiences as a mother during her audition . Cherry called Huffman 's casting " very lucky , " commenting that " within fifteen minutes she had the part . " Alex Kingston read for the role of Lynette , and has since alleged that she was denied the role for being too heavy . The role of series narrator Mary Alice Young was given to Sheryl Lee . Cross originally auditioned for the role before being cast as Bree instead . Jeanne Tripplehorn and Heather Locklear also auditioned for leading roles .

Ricardo Antonio Chavira was cast as Gabrielle 's wealthy and condescending husband , Carlos Solis . Kyle Searles joined the cast as John Rowland , the Solis ' teenage gardener with whom Gabrielle is having an affair . Andrea Bowen was hired to play Susan 's teenage daughter , Julie , while James Denton was cast as Susan 's love interest and new neighbor , plumber Mike Delfino . Mark Moses was cast as Paul , Mary Alice 's mysterious husband , and Cody Kasch as their troubled teenage son Zach . Michael Reilly Burke was cast as Bree 's sexually dissatisfied husband , Rex Van de Kamp . The pilot also introduced several recurring cast members . Christine Estabrook appeared as nosy neighbor Martha Huber , a role originally intended for an Asian American actress . Doug Savant made his first appearance as Tom , Lynette 's husband who is always away on business . Savant later became a series regular for the second season , a promise Cherry made to him when he signed on for the first season . Shawn Pyfrom and Joy Lauren each made their debut appearances as Andrew and Danielle Van de Kamp , Bree 's defiant teenage children . Cherry stated that casting the two roles was difficult because of their limited involvement in the first few episodes of the series . Additionally , Brent Kinsman , Shane Kinsman , and Zane Huett were cast respectively as Preston , Porter , and Parker Scavo , Lynette and Tom 's three sons .

= = = Filming and subsequent casting changes = = =

Filming for the pilot was initially intended to take place in an actual Los Angeles neighborhood until the production team realized the difficulties that would ensue . Instead they chose Colonial Street , a backlot street set at Universal Studios Hollywood . The house sets on Colonial Street had been used in numerous film and television productions as early as 1946 . Many of the sets , whose styles ranged from contemporary to Victorian to ranch , were remodeled to create a uniform neighborhood . Cherry and production designer Thomas A. Walsh wanted the street to recall the Eisenhower era and convey traditional American values , but appear modern at the same time . Walsh viewed episodes of *Father Knows Best* , *My Three Sons* , and *Leave It to Beaver* , among other television series , to capture the visual style of classic conservative America . Walsh commented , " We were trying to honor that sensibility and at the same time create an everyplace that was neither a red state nor a blue state . " Instead , Walsh insisted that the street was in " kind of a pink state . We 're somewhere in the middle of America 's soul . " Refurbishments of the house sets , which included building interior rooms , cost around \$ 700 @,@ 000 . While Walsh strove for a visually unified look for the street as a whole , he carefully designed the interior of each home to reflect the tastes and budgets of the characters .

According to McDougall , another director was originally hired to work on the episode but quit after learning casting would be a group decision . Filming took place over thirteen days in March 2004 . During filming , McDougall suggested removing references to pop culture from the script to ensure the pilot had " more of a timeless feel . " ABC picked up the series for 13 episodes on May 18 , 2004 . In June , ABC called for three starring cast members to be recast . Jesse Metcalfe replaced Searles as John Rowland , as producers wanted to add more sexual appeal to the role " to justify why (Gabrielle) was having an affair . " Metcalfe had previously read for the role during the initial casting process . The role of Rex Van de Kamp was given to Steven Culp , who was Cherry 's first choice for the part but was unavailable when the original pilot was filmed . Brenda Strong took over the role of Mary Alice , as producers thought that Lee was not right for the part . Strong commented on the casting change for her character , explaining , " I think it was a conceptual shift ... There certainly wasn 't something wrong with what [Lee] did . It was just that instead of vanilla they

wanted chocolate , and I happened to be chocolate . " Scenes featuring the original actors were refilmed with their replacements , however Burke and Searles are present in the background of some scenes in the final cut of the episode .

= = Release and reception = =

= = = Promotion and viewership = = =

To promote the series , ABC issued a laundry @-@ themed campaign and purchased advertisement space in magazines such as InStyle and People and on dry @-@ cleaning bags across the country . The show 's raciness prompted several advertisers to remove their commercials from the broadcast , but they were quickly replaced . The pilot premiered at 9 pm Eastern Time Zone (ET) on October 3 , 2004 , one week after its intended broadcast date . The premiere drew 21 @-@ 6 million viewers and an 8 @-@ 9 rating / 21 share among adults 18 to 49 years of age . It was the highest debut for an ABC series since Spin City in 1996 and for any non @-@ spinoff series since NBC 's Inside Schwartz in 2001 , as well as the most @-@ watched debut of a drama series in eleven years . The pilot was the most @-@ watched program of the week and also had the highest rating among the demographic of women aged 18 to 49 . Additionally , it was the most @-@ watched program among men aged 18 to 34 . In the United Kingdom , the pilot aired on Channel 4 on January 5 , 2005 and drew 4 @-@ 8 million viewers , the highest premiere for a drama series on the network since ER nine years earlier .

= = = Critical reception = = =

The pilot was met with extremely positive critical reception . Robert Bianco of USA Today gave the series premiere four out of four stars , commenting that it was as " involving as any new drama and funnier than any new sitcom [because it] matches high visual style with a witty @-@ but @-@ never arch sensibility . " He highlighted the performances of the six leading actresses , writing , " Individually , each is terrific ; combined , they 're an irresistible feminine force " , and praised Hatcher 's " revelatory performance . " Bianco also noted that Cherry avoided making the pilot campy . The San Francisco Chronicle 's Tim Goodman complimented the pilot 's tonal diversity while expressing concern that American audiences would " tune in , get freaked out by the scattershot emotional chords and flip over to something safer . " However , he praised Cherry 's writing as well as the acting , declaring , " There are almost too many things to love in ' Desperate Housewives . ' " In his review of the episode , Matthew Gilbert of The Boston Globe commended the episode for its " marvelous tonal elasticity , as it stretches from sharp satire to dishy soap opera to tragique tribute and back again . "

Justin Ravitz of PopMatters called the series a " cleverly trashy postmodern soap " and credited it for reviving the soap opera genre , which he felt had disappeared but still suited American culture . He compared the pilot to Sex and the City , declaring it " could potentially replace the departed Sex as the TV Sunday ritual for women and gay men everywhere , although DH is the guiltier pleasure of the two . " However , he noted the contrasting tones and dynamics between the two series , and stated that the friendships between Desperate Housewives 's four leading women seemed " tenuous , " opining , " the sisterly , sugar @-@ swapping connection between the surviving women is superficial , and clearly vulnerable to shifting alliances , acts of betrayal and crowd @-@ pleasing cat @-@ fights . " Brian Lowry of Variety called the pilot " oodles of fun . " He complimented the cast , stating that while Hatcher provides " the emotional core " of the series , " nearly everyone is intriguing in one way or another , " and predicted that Eva Longoria would become the show 's breakout star . However , Lowry noted that Desperate Housewives may be " a little too smart for its own good " and expressed concern over the series ' " soapy elements . " Tom Shales of The Washington Post praised the pilot , assessing , " In visual style , witty language , borderline surrealism and overall mad attitude , [the series] stands on a mountaintop all its own , the best new

drama of the season and perhaps the best new comedy , too . " He complimented Cross and Hatcher 's performances , as well as the writing for the Mary Alice character 's narrations . The Futon Critic selected the pilot as the 26th best television episode of 2004 .

= = = Awards = = =

The pilot episode won three Emmy Awards : Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series (Felicity Huffman) , Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series (Charles McDougall) , and Outstanding Single @-@ Camera Picture Editing for a Comedy Series (Michael Berenbaum) . Marc Cherry was nominated for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series . Berenbaum also won for an American Cinema Editor 's Award for his work on the episode . McDougall was also nominated for a Directors Guild of America Award for directing the episode .