Selected Projects in Scenic and Costume Design

Spencer M. Potter
Utah State University

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SELECTED PROJECTS IN SCENIC AND COSTUME DESIGN

by

Spencer M. Potter

Plan B project report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

Scenic Design and Costume Design

Approved:

_______________________________  __________________________________________
Shawn Fisher                            Nancy Hills
Major Professor                        Committee Member

_______________________________  __________________________________________
Bruce Duerden                           Leslie Brott
Committee Member                       Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

2014
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Twentieth Century

By

Ken Ludwig

Directed by: Leslie Brott

Set Design by: Spencer Potter

Costume Design by: Nancy Hills

Lighting Design by: Mauri Smith

Utah State University Department of Theatre Arts

Morgan Theatre

Fall 2011
**Introduction**

The play is set in two staterooms and the lounge car of the luxurious 20th Century Limited, also known as the "millionaires' line." *20th Century* is a drawing room comedy/farce set on a train; the comedy is derived from, and often at the expense of, the close relationships of the characters, especially the relationship between Lily Garland and Oscar Jaffe. Much of the action moves quickly between the staterooms and the lounge car. Depending on interpretation, there is also the possibility of having the train platform as a fourth setting. Because the script is very fast paced, the set needed to allow rapid scene changes so as not to interrupt the flow of the play.

**Play Synopsis**

Ken Ludwig’s play is an adaptation of a 1930’s play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. The best way to explain the plot and premise of this play, which winds and turns much like a rail line itself, is with the playwright’s own summary:

*20th Century* is the story of Oscar Jaffe, the egomaniacal Broadway director, and Lily Garland, the chorus girl he transformed into a leading lady. Bankrupt, with his career on a downslide, Oscar boards the Twentieth Century Limited and encounters Lily, now a temperamental Hollywood star. He will do anything to get her back under contract and back in his bed, but his former protégé will have nothing to do with him. All of the action takes place on board the legendary Twentieth Century train from Chicago to New York City where Oscar has 20 hours to persuade Lily to return to Broadway in his upcoming show. If he fails, it is the end of the line. (Plays)
Character Breakdown

- ANITA HIGHLAND – Dr. Lockwood’s mistress
- DR. GROVER LOCKWOOD – a doctor traveling
- MATTHEW CLARK – an eccentric and delusional millionaire that Jaffe convinces to be his next backer
- OWEN O'MALLEY – Jaffe’s strong arm
- IDA WEBB – Jaffe’s secretary
- OSCAR JAFFE – A bombastic Broadway producer
- LILY GARLAND – Jaffe’s past love and former starlet
- GEORGE SMITH – Lily’s traveling companion and new beau
- BEARD – A member of a touring German passion play
- MAX JACOBS – Jaffe’s rival producer. He has stolen Lily away to his productions.

Venue

The venue selected for the production was Utah State's Morgan Theater, a thrust stage. Thrust stages protrude into the audience and have seating on three sides. The venue was the first design challenge. 20th Century is usually staged on a proscenium stage with the three rooms rolling on tracks or rolling platforms behind the proscenium, revealing two rooms at a time. With the Morgan's twenty-four foot thrust, having the entire action take place behind the proscenium wasn't a feasible option because it would create a twenty-four foot gap between the audience and action of the play. Both Leslie Brott, the
director, and I were concerned that the large amount of space between the audience and the performers would become a psychological barrier, which could easily disengage the audience from the story.

**Design Concept & Objectives**

In telling the story of *20th Century*, several design objectives were very important: a feeling of speed and acceleration, verisimilitude of the layout and period style of the train, and maintaining the farce comedy style of the script. Speed and acceleration were important objectives because they were major themes in the play. The romanticized version of rail travel, and especially the 20th Century Limited, is one of speed. Furthermore, as Oscar and Lily draw closer to New York and Oscar has not yet convinced Lily to come back to Broadway, the stakes rise, and a feeling of urgency develops. Speed is also important for the farce style of the play. Farces have a fast tempo, which is important for comedic timing and effect. For me, the challenge was visually evoking the themes of speed and acceleration.

The second objective, verisimilitude, was important because I was dealing with a historic and famous train. In a way, I felt a responsibility to use as much imagery from the Twentieth Century Limited as I could in order to recreate the Century for our audiences. I feel when Hecht and MacArthur wrote the original play in the 1930's, it was the average persons' way of experiencing the millionaire's line for themselves; thus creating a similar experience for our audience was important to me as a designer. In addition, making the interior feel as train-like as possible was central because it would have ramifications on blocking and how the space was used.
Finally, the third objective, maintaining the drawing room style comedy, was important because the humor is based on relationships, such as that of Lily and Oscar. There is a certain intimacy about this relationship-based action. While some of the comedy utilizes the broad movements of farce comedy, much of it is derived from the fine-fencing match of dialog and emotions happening between characters. For example, Oscar and Lily simultaneously love and hate each other so passionately -- one cannot help but laugh at this contest between two enormous egos. Because of the relational nature of the comedy, I wanted the audience to be physically close to the action.

**Research**

One of the first places I turned for inspiration for my design was the travel posters and graphic art of the time period (fig. 1.1 &1.2). What I liked most about these images were the strong sense of movement, color palette, composition, and abstractions. The abstract shape, lines and how they’re composed creates a feeling of visual movement. Thus, they became major influences for achieving my design objective of evoking speed and acceleration with geometrical shapes and lines.

The next major research areas were the period style and information on the train itself. The first thing I discovered was at the time the play takes place, 1933, that the 20th Century Line wasn't running the beautiful engine designed by Henry Dreyfus in 1938 (Cook, 3) (fig 1.5). Instead, the engine running at the time was something much more reminiscent of old west steam engines. (fig. 1.4). Both Leslie and I agreed in order to evoke the Art Deco period and style of the show, it would be best to set the style of the train ahead five years in the mode of Henry Dreyfus' 1938 engine design. I was fortunate to find a wonderful book on the 20th Century by Richard J. Cook, Sr. called *The Twentieth Century Limited: 1938-1967*. The book chronicled the history and
The development of the rail line. It also featured many valuable research images. It had detailed plans of Dreyfus' updated engine design, and dimensions of the cars and engine of the 20th Century (fig. 1.5). This was an invaluable resource for establishing the layout for each room. Closely adhering to the actual dimensions of the train cars created limited acting spaces; therefore, it was necessary to take some artistic license and expand the spaces while at the same time maintaining the compact feeling of train staterooms and lounges. In my research, I observed one of the major interior design elements which suggested, "traveling by train" was the clever use of space. Some examples of this were: built in furniture, pocket doors, and other built in items such as radios. At the same time, one interior element I found set the 20th Century Limited apart from typical trains was the use of freestanding furniture, such as armchairs (fig. 1.6). This showcased the luxury and comfort of their cars. The freestanding furniture greatly limited the amount of passengers a single car could carry and became a statement about luxury rather than economy of seating.

*Fig. 1.1. Research image. Norman Fraser, 1933*

Fraser's 1933 World's Fair poster exudes Deco elegance and conveys movement with its motion lines above the train.
A. M. Cassandre, 1928. Above Cassandre’s lithograph is a prime example of an abstract art deco interpretation of a train. It served as the major inspiration for a more abstract and graphic style.

Above, an example of floor plans for the Century. This floor plan shows the luxury of the Century with the club lounge and accompanying barbershop (Cook 98).
Other decorative elements that suggested luxury were the choice of light fixtures, as well as rich colors and materials. Instead of being utilitarian, the light fixtures (fig. 1.7) of the Century were more like those you would see in a deco building. In addition, the choice of decorative materials such as metallic insets, polished woods, and glossy surfaces were something that made the Century a unique train and a unique travel experience (fig. 1.7).
Another striking design element of the Century was the amount of thought given to the exterior of the train. Dreyfus continued to design sleek speed and modern taste with an abstracted lightning bolt trailing along the exterior of the train (fig. 1.8). I was drawn to this lightning bolt motif because it could serve two functions: First, it was a direct historical reference to the exterior of the train. Second, the abstract quality of the motif and its lines implied speed with the diagonal shift and length of lines. Later on, this motif became one of my main ways of suggesting the exterior of the train and another way of creating a sense of movement and speed.

Fig. 1.6. Research image. Above, one of the Century's lounges show shows luxury with freestanding armchairs and spacious arrangement.

Fig. 1.7. Research image. Above, another lounge demonstrates the luxury of the century with its

Fig. 1.8. Research image. Above, a model of one of the Century's cars shows the lightning bolt motif used on the exterior design of the set (Proto).
Design Development

When I began to develop my design, I knew I needed to be very mindful about how to create the feeling of the train. I bounced through many ideas as I waited to meet with Leslie. Two rough designs seemed to stick. The first design was very literal in its approach. It consisted of a nearly full-scale recreation of the train engine, which contained the three rooms (fig 1.9). At the top of the show, the engine would be upstage with a platform unit and some other scenic elements to convey a train station. The whole engine unit would then roll down and revolve to reveal the interior. There were a couple obstacles posed by this. First, it would have been a massive scene change taking place in a moment meant to be a quick from the interior to the exterior. A large scene change could be slow, and slowing down the action as the play was starting would diminish the starting energy of the play. Second, there was the reoccurring problem of adequate acting space. To have a large enough acting space, the unit would need to be too far upstage, thereby defeating the objective of bringing the action downstage. Despite its problems, one core idea of this initial design remained. This idea was an interior setting encased by an exterior set piece.

The second preliminary design was the opposite of the first. It was more abstract and relied on the choice of materials and train motifs, such as wheels and pistons, to create the setting of a train instead of a literal representation (fig. 1.10). First, the solution for multiple rooms was a revolve on the thrust divided into the three rooms. As the action changed from room to room, the revolve would move and bring the appropriate room or rooms into view.
Fig. 1.9. Sketch - Initial design sketch.

Fig. 1.10. Rendering - Second preliminary rendering.
There was also the possibility for chase scenes to take place downstage center and creating the illusion of movement by having the unit revolve behind the actors. In this design, the exterior look was abandoned and showed only the interiors. In order to suggest a train, the materials in the rooms were steel and wood – reminiscent of railroad ties and tracks. Another manifestation of railroad tracks was the central post that divided the rooms, at the top of which was a simplified abstraction of the train engine. Railroad ties and the workings of large train wheels inspired the dividers that came out of this central post; the large semicircle at the base of the central post represented a wheel and the large pieces coming out served as railroad ties, as well as the drive mechanism for the wheel.

There were some complications with this second design. Again, transitioning between rooms was a predicament and there were concerns that the existing revolve for the Morgan stage could not swiftly transition from room to room. The audience being able to see from room to room was also an issue. This design was easy to place downstage, but it curved in a circle and would block views of the other rooms for audience members in extreme far left and right seats. For audience members in these sections, only half of a room would be visible at times. I also had concerns about the aesthetic. Although the rooms were period inspired they simply did not communicate “train.” What the rooms really looked like were large hotel suites because of their height and shape. Despite its shortcomings, there were some valuable aspects of this design. A revolve looked like it would be the best way to move a large unit, and even though the existing revolve couldn't handle switching from room to room, it could handle the relatively slower changes from exterior to interior scenes.
**Final Design**

Again, one of my major design objectives was bringing the action as far downstage as possible. Once Leslie and I had a chance to meet and discuss the play, Leslie requested at most eighteen inches between the edge of the stage and the end of the playing space. This was a reasonable request, but it was easier said than done. Because the scenery was so far downstage, sight lines, masking the backstage, and accessibility for actors and crew became a major quandary. Having the action so far downstage would block the furthest left and right sections of the Morgan Theater. Another problem arose: with the set downstage, there was not enough space for three appropriately sized rooms. With no room on either side of the thrust stage and no time between scenes to bring another set on stage, the only option was to make a second level. Adding a second level gave more space for the performance and created an interesting grand look.

![Fig. 1.11. Rendering - First double-decker rendering.](image-url)
Fig. 1.12. Model - Color model interior view.

Fig. 1.13. Model - Color model exterior View.
After getting the two staterooms and lounge downstage, the next challenge was providing actors’ access to the set. The simple solution was building a false proscenium and a series of masking flats.

Having the scenery downstage achieved several other objectives. First, because the scenery was closer to the audience, the intimate and up close style of the play was maintained. This audience proximity allowed the audience to feel more included in the action. I wanted the audience to feel like they were passengers. Second, the tighter playing spaces facilitated quick transitions from room to room and scene to scene. The fast transitions and rapid entrances maintained the energy and tempo of the play.

Fig. 1.15. Production Photo- Final realized interior design.
Ultimately, the director and I wanted to establish an exterior look for the moments of the play taking place on the station platforms. This is not part of the traditional staging for this show, but we felt an exterior look was a unique opportunity provided by the Morgan stage. In order to do this, I designed the central unit to revolve. One side of the central unit was the exterior and the other side the interior (fig. 1.16). From a storytelling standpoint, the exterior look at the beginning and end of the show gave a sense of a completed travel or conclusion.

After dealing with the function and placement of the whole set, the interiors were the next focus. The primary concerns about the interiors were sightlines and access. First, because of sightlines, I decided to make the separation between the two rooms as minimal as possible. The solution was a built-in bench that divided the rooms and served as seating. The bench provided a clear barrier, and because it was low to the ground, there was minimal intrusion into sightlines.

There were a couple of concerns about access to the set; first, access to the lounge level and second, access to the staterooms. Stairs were required for second
level access, but could not take a lot of space. The stairs needed to be compact was so the stairs did not interfere with sightlines and the revolving unit. For these reasons, a circular staircase was a sensible solution. The central unit would revolve between the stairs. This meant there could not be a permanent connection between the stairs and the revolving unit. Several options were explored, but were thrown out due to setup time. The final solution was creating a landing that allowed the unit to revolve within it. Because the unit revolved within the circle, the landing would simply need a curve that matched the circle the unit followed. This also meant having rounded ends on the unit that fit inside the circle instead of square edges as originally designed (fig. 1.17). Between the curved landing and the curved edges of the unit, the only space needed for the revolve clearance was about one inch. This was a more than safe gap for actors to step across and eliminated the need for any other moving parts during scene changes. The only thing necessary for scene changes between the interior and exterior was the revolve.

Later in the process, the revolve became problematic. An outside party booked the venue two and half weeks before tech and required a bare stage. It became unfeasible to use the turntable due to the amount of labor it would take to take apart and reinstall. The solution was making the central unit its own revolving unit. Matt Stowe, the technical
director for the production, designed a built-in bearing pivot system. The system was built into the central unit that rolled into place. After being placed, the unit was then bolted to the stage floor through a plate on the revolve. Once anchored to the floor, the unit revolved on a single, self-contained axis. The flexibility and ease of the new revolve system allowed the set to be removed and repositioned multiple times. Triple swivel casters were critical for smooth and reliable movement of the unit. Although they are expensive – around, $100 per caster, they were a worthwhile investment for not only 20th Century but also future productions.

Actors getting to and from the staterooms became the next access concern. Actors could mostly access the staterooms via the corridor. However, when actors went into the extreme stage right and left doors, which were doors to other parts of the respective stateroom, they needed to be concealed or escape entirely to make costume changes. The stage left stateroom, which was Oscar's, required soft masking in the hall to conceal his changing area. Lily's stateroom, on the stage right side, was not as simple of a solution. Lilly’s multiple costume changes needed the assistance of several costumers, which required Lily somehow get off stage (fig. 1.18). The answer came by duplicating the masking on stage left and adding a concealed escape door that would allow Lily to leave the unit and change behind the proscenium.

Fig. 1.18. Drafting selection.
Floor plan section showing escape doors
In hindsight, the functional solutions for the set seem simple enough. However, it took a lot planning to ensure all of the pieces were going to fit together in exactly the right way. If one flat moved even a few inches to the left, it would reveal an escape. If a staircase were not precisely placed, it would collide with the central unit as it revolved. However, thanks to the patience and help of my advisors, technical staff, and director, everything fit together smoothly and looked beautiful.

With all of the moving parts in place, I was finally able to address the aesthetic and style of the show. From the beginning of my process, I knew I wanted to incorporate one my favorite visuals of the 1930's: glamorous travel posters. In the posters, I was enticed by the strong sense of style, movement, and action created by composition and lines. They were a natural influence in achieving the objective of conveying movement and acceleration via line, shape, and composition.

**Color Palette**

Another aspect of posters I was interested in was the use of color. The colors are bold and with broad strokes and shapes. Because they are bold, there is also a certain amount of energy to them, which could contribute to a feeling of speed. Using these colors in solid shapes worked well with the costume design. Nancy Hills, the costume designer, was using a lot of patterned fabrics and dark suits. Nancy and I talked quite a bit about color palette, making sure both of our designs were going to work well together.

In order to decide on a color palette, I uploaded photos that had colors I liked to an online color palette generator. (fig. 1.19, 1.20 & 1.21). The color palette generator analyzes all the colors in the photo and breaks them down into CMKY colors. This makes pinpointing a specific color in an image a lot easier, and it also facilitates color matching
in the paint shop or paint store. In addition, the color palettes enabled smooth communication about color with the lighting designer and costume designer.

For the exterior of the train, I uploaded a colored photograph of a model of the Century and generated a color palette that reflected the actual color of the train’s exterior, (fig. 1.19) which was a medium bluish gray. I took some artistic license with the color palette for the interior of the train. In a design meeting with Nancy and Leslie, I pulled up a photo of a Spanish travel poster (fig. 1.20). Leslie and Nancy were enthusiastic about the colors, and we all agreed the blues and creams in the poster would work nicely with the costumes and give a handsome look to the rooms.

To contrast the cool blues of the staterooms, I wanted to go with something warmer for the lounge. Nancy had suggested I look up Eltham Palace and its Art Deco wing. The colors of Eltham Palace were rich and warm, and these images were what got me going in the direction of burnt orange and brown. At first glance, the image seemed bland - lots of creams and tans. However, when I generated a color palette for it, many surprising burnt oranges appeared I was attracted to these warmer colors because it was a harmonious contrast between the lounge and staterooms.

The color palette for the false proscenium was inspired by the use of red by the 20th Century Line. The 20th Century Line is literally where the red carpet treatment started (Grace). Red was also a trademark color for the Century, appearing on menus, itineraries, and even matchbooks. These items usually sported the handsome 20th Century logo (fig. 1.22), which was also designed by Henry Dreyfus. Thus, red was an appropriate color to use because of its historical use on the train line.
Fig. 1.19. Exterior color palette.

Fig. 1.20. Staterooms color palette.

Fig. 1.21. Lounge color palette.
I chose to evoke acceleration via the two large masking flats that created the false proscenium (fig. 1.26 & 1.27). The inspiration for these elements came from two places. The first was the logo for the 2003 Exposition of the Decorative Arts (fig. 1.24). The general shape and scale of the logo was what first gave me the idea of using some type of
false proscenium to frame the picture on stage. The second piece of inspiration was a silver plated medal issued for the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of General Motors (fig. 1.25). Ironically, the designer of the medal, Norman Bel Geddes, had been a set designer at one point in his career. In a way, it seemed fitting his work should inspire another set designer. What impressed me about the design of the medal was the sense of scale and movement. The large wing shape against the smaller train or car object in the medal gave a monumental feeling. The motion lines coming off the car shape provided a sense of speed. I liked the idea of using two towers on each side of the unit and then a third horizontal piece to imply the top of the proscenium instead of a large, literal proscenium.

The medal also inspired the stage left flat and horizontal proscenium section, (fig. 1.27). To me, the lines and the swooshing shape they make as they create the top of the proscenium, have a strong sense of movement. This visual movement is especially seen as the lines make the ninety degree turn and come over the top of the scenery, much like smoke arching over the top of a rocketing train. The stage right flat (fig. 1.26) was inspired by the logos of the 20th Century Line and, to me, evoked railroad tracks. I could almost hear, "clickity-clack, clickity-clack" when I looked at the flat. Similarly, as the cream bands get smaller the closer they are to the floor; I could almost hear the sound of a passing train.

Another element of acceleration was the lightning bolt motif of the exterior of the train (fig. 1.8). This pattern was an actual pattern on the 20th Century Limited and, to me, it indicates "lightning bolt speed." The lightning bolt also speaks to the 1930s love affair with technology, speed, and sleek glamour.
Figure 1.26. Drawing.
Stage right masking flat/ false proscenium piece featuring the 20th Century logo. During the production process the lettering was cut.

Fig. 1.27.Drawing.
Stage left masking/ false proscenium aka "Buck Rogers."
Because the styling of the Century was not necessarily what a general audience might envision as the archetypal train, freestanding furniture and relatively large staterooms, and because the set was both realistic and abstract, unity of appearance was important. For the interior of the train, a major design goal was creating a space that could believably feel like the interior of a train car. The main elements I relied on to create the feel of a train within the compartments were sliding doors, the built-in center bench, a built-in radio, luggage racks, and rounded windows that matched the exterior of the train. These were all conventional interior elements found in passenger cars.

The selective removal of baseboards and chair rails, which are standard conventions for buildings, was another way of creating a believable passenger car space. From what I could gather from my research, things like baseboards were not a decorative feature of the Century. However, I did choose to put a chair rail and baseboard in the corridor. This was because the hallway looked bare when visible and it needed some sort of simple detail to give it a finished look. I also thought the corridor might have been a place where chair rails and baseboards would be used to protect the walls from luggage carts.

For the walls of the staterooms, I chose art deco patterns to use as a sort of wallpaper in the rooms, and patterns for the doors to create a sense of art deco detail (fig. 1.28). But, when the patterns were painted; the dark blue and black colors were too dark to distinguish them from each other. Annie Lyman-Burdzy, my paint charge, and I solved this problem with partial silver outline around the patterns. Even after the outlining, the walls still appeared flat, so the next step was applying a semi-gloss finish to the sections
painted with patterns. The semi-gloss finish caught the light very nicely and provided the dimension that the wall needed.

Because of the number of windows in the set, there were great opportunities for lighting. I was flexible with backdrop design so Mauri Smith, the lighting designer, could have input with what she needed for her design. I had originally suggested a scrim or cyc, but eventually Mauri decided to simply light the back wall of the stage. Another lighting opportunity that arose from the set was the windows of the masking on either side of the stage; however, because of their construction and the angle of light, there was a shadow on at least a third of each window. I had noticed the shadows and was thinking on what to do about it when Dennis suggested putting a pull on each window. Putting a pull on each window made it appear there was the silhouette of a pull down blind. I took Dennis' advice, and think it proved be a good solution and another level of detail (fig. 1.29 & 1.30).

Fig. 1.28. Research image.
Samples of art deco patterns I based the wallpaper patterns on (art deco).
Looking back on the design, the biggest challenge was figuring out the functional space, and I'm proud of how well the set moved and worked to tell the story. However, I acknowledge utility came at the cost of some design detail. Even after adding furniture and radios, I still feel the rooms were a little bare and flat. Another valuable experience was drafting and getting feedback from Matt and Bruce about how to improve my drafting skills and how to communicate more clearly in my drafting.

If there were one thing I could go back and revise, it would be some of the paint treatments. Even though they were flat like art deco travel posters, the painted surfaces needed some sort of break up. I think a paint break up would have helped solve the issue of flatness. For instance, on the blue walls of the stateroom, I maybe could have scumbled two shades of blue together before adding the wall pattern and gloss.

I think I would also utilize the exterior look more. The exterior look of the train was only used at the beginning and end of the show. Because it was used at these points, the look created a sense of opening and closing. However, I think there could have been potential to show an exterior view during some of the chase scenes. For those scenes, I could see the central unit revolving and framing the chase scenes in the windows of the train. With lights flashing and passing, I think it could have added a lot of energy and excitement to those scenes.
Fig. 1.29. Production photo.
Close up shot of side masking with "rolling blinds."

Fig. 1.30. Production photo.
Wide exterior shot showing side masking on both sides.
Fig. 1.31. Production photo - Opening scene on the station platform.

Fig. 1.32. Production photo - Scene in second level lounge.
Fig. 1.33. Production photo - scene in Lily's stateroom.

Fig. 1.34. Production photo - Scene is Oscar's stateroom.
Fig. 1.35. Production photo - wide shot of both staterooms
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Legally Blonde: The Musical
Book by Heather Hack
Music and Lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe and Nell Benjamin
Directed by Ken Risch
Set Design by Spencer Potter
Lighting Design by Bruce Duerden
Projection Design by Kenny Driggs

Utah State University Department of Theatre Arts
Morgan Theatre
Fall 2012
Introduction

When the opportunity arose to design Legally Blonde, I didn't think twice. I knew I needed to show some variety and versatility in my portfolio. Most of my work in the past had been dark, moody or period-style productions. Legally Blonde was the perfect opportunity to try my hand at a contemporary musical and stretch my design comfort zone. There is perhaps no other play more alien to my own personal experience than Legally Blonde. I knew this play would stretch my frame of empathy and designing the world of a blonde, bubbly co-ed would definitely be an enjoyable challenge. Legally Blonde was also a show that required a lot of thought and planning in order to facilitate the thirty plus scene changes. Those changes are fast and, at times seamless.

Synopsis

I feel many people’s initial impression of Legally Blonde is a fun but shallow, silly show. However, there is more to the story than its cute, peppy appearance. Fittingly, looking beyond appearances is a major theme in the script. Elle and this show are much more complicated than the pink exterior; both represent unrealized potential. Another theme of the show is the pitfalls of being judgmental. In the show, judgment and appearance are also critical themes. We see through Elle, Callahan, and Emmett the downfalls of judgmentalism and the triumphs made by digging deeper to see potential in those around us. As I continued to revisit the script and work with the director, Ken Risch, I was struck with how much substance the show has.

The musical begins in the Delta Nu sorority house at UCLA. Elle and her sisters are ecstatic; singing about Elle's date with her longtime boyfriend, Warner Huntington.
Elle and her sisters are sure Warner will propose to Elle. Sadly, they are all mistaken. Warner dumps Elle. He is going to Harvard law school and thinks he needs to date someone "serious" to be successful. After her initial devastation, Elle, undaunted, decides she will apply for Harvard law, join Warner, and win him back. Against all odds, and with a few musical numbers, Elle is admitted to Harvard.

Elle discovers the hard part wasn't getting into Harvard. Instead, fitting in with the Ivy League, preppy culture will be her biggest challenge. Initially Elle does not fit in at all. She is thrown out of class, mocked relentlessly by Warner's new girlfriend, Vivenne, and faces constant humiliation over her appearance and personality. Elle finds one ally, Emmett. Emmett is the teaching assistant for Elle's class with the infamous Professor Callahan, an immoral and aggressive lawyer. Emmett sees past Elle's appearance and sees her potential. Emmett helps her study and eventually Elle becomes a contender in class. Elle's success gets her the attention of Professor Callahan. Callahan selects her as an intern for a high profile murder trial.

Brooke Windham, exercise and fitness queen, stands accused of murdering her much older husband. Callahan's legal team is defending her, and have failed to get an alibi from Brooke. Without an alibi, Brooke doesn't stand a chance at winning her case. The rest of the team gives up and leaves, but Elle stays behind and begins to softly sing the Delta Nu sisters song. Brooke recognizes the tune, she was a Delta Nu as well, and the two immediately bond. Brooke reveals her alibi but swears Elle to secrecy. Elle's success gets her more attention from Callahan, more than she would care for. Callahan kisses Elle at a party. This act shows all he ever saw in Elle was her appearance. Crushed and hurt, Elle packs her things and decides to quit the case and go back to California.
However, Vivenne, Elle’s initial enemy, finds Elle and tells her she saw what happened with Elle and Callahan. Vivenne asks Elle to not give up on the case. Elle decides to come back to the case. Brooke fires Callahan and his legal team and hires Elle to defend her. Elle's knowledge of hair care ultimately wins the case as she points out a huge hole in the prosecution’s alibi. Finally, Elle exceeds the expectations of her peers and graduates as the class valedictorian.

**Character Break Down**

- **BROOKE WYNDAM** - An exercise video mogul who is also a former sorority girl. She is energetic and charismatic, yet currently on trial for murder.

- **ELLE WOODS** - The quintessential Valley Girl who follows her ex-boyfriend to Harvard Law School and realizes that she has more to offer than just a pretty face and a bubbly personality.

- **EMMETT FORREST** - A smart and sensitive law student who takes Elle under his wing. He is charming, quirky, loveable, and friendly.

- **ENSEMBLE GREEK CHORUS; STUDENTS; DELTA NU MEMBERS**

- **PAULETTE** - A brash, caring, optimistic hair stylist who is friends with Elle and longs to find a man for herself.

- **PROFESSOR CALLAHAN** - A pompous, sleazy and manipulative law professor at Harvard who is highly successful, but completely immoral.

- **VIVIENNE KENSINGTON** - A smart, savvy, and uptight law student and Warner's fiancée who initially dismisses Elle, but grows to be her friend.

- **WARNER HUNTINGTON III** - A good-looking but shallow and pompous guy who breaks Elle's heart and heads off to Harvard Law (Legally).
**Venue**

The first challenge was figuring out how this set would move between locations. The Morgan Theater was again the venue for my design, and as I discovered during *20th Century*, comes with its own set of logistical challenges. Because *Legally Blonde: The Musical* is based on the film *Legally Blonde*, the musical is very cinematic with crossfades between scenes. There are no curtain songs or other conventions that allow for scene changes to happen behind a closed curtain or provide distractions while scenes change. The scenes also clip along and run together much like film with immediate, seamless transitions. The solution was moving scenery would play a key part in making these transitions.

Moving scenery can be a problem on the Morgan stage. Unlike most theatres producing this musical, the Morgan has only a half fly system. This means the types of scenery raised and lowered in on lines are very limited. In order to be concealed, those pieces can only be half the height of the proscenium. Also, unlike the Broadway houses, which first produced this show, the Morgan has no trap systems that allow for transporting scenery or actors. This meant that most of the scene changes would need to use large rolling platforms and pieces. The fly system could only lower in smaller scenic elements such as signs, banners, or drops. It was also very important that the transitions were as self-sufficient as possible. It was essential that the shifts not require many people to handle the change. I wanted the scenic elements to effortlessly and elegantly glide on and off stage. This was vital because Elle is effortless and stylish. I thought as many elements of the design should reflect her in that way.
**Design Concept & Objectives**

Fast, smooth transitions and an elegant aesthetic were important to the director. From our very first meetings, Ken made it very clear he wanted an elegant and streamlined design, which facilitated quick and efficient scene changes. To illustrate this, we had a design meeting with lights and costumes and watched the MTV recording of the Broadway musical. We weren't watching for style or criticism, but rather to see how "this beast moves" as Ken put it. After the film, Ken's first suggestion was some sort of super structure with a versatile second level. This was something that I was already looking into for the same reasons as Ken. A main structure would unify the design with a central visual. It could also serve as central place of action while other set pieces rolled on and off stage. Ken also felt it was important the overall shapes were soft, curved, open, airy, and feminine because we were creating Elle's world. Creating Elle's world proved to be a larger challenge than I expected, as will be discussed later on.

Another suggestion of Ken's was he would like to use projections in this production. He thought we could use projections for not only scenic elements but also thematic elements and motifs. I was excited by the possibilities of this method, but also a little nervous. I was nervous because, I hadn’t worked much with projections and wasn’t sure exactly how the relationship between scenery and projection design work. For *Legally Blonde*, the fast pace and varied locations of the production could be very challenging to coordinate projection media and especially projector positions could be difficult. Never the less, my first objective in facilitating projection was designing surfaces that could be used as screens.
Figuring out the aesthetic of *Legally Blonde* was the third major objective. One of the given circumstances about the play is that Elle and her world are very fashionable. But, how could this be visually represented? The first place I looked for inspiration was fashion runways. There were several promising things about them I thought could be applied to the design. First, runways are designed with the purpose of displaying fashions and models. Because of the scale of the Morgan, and the musical itself, I could see a potential pitfall of too many scenic elements blocking the actors or visually distracting from the actors. Therefore, the sleek look of fashion runways could help direct focus and bring attention to the actors because of the minimalist styling. This also worked well with Ken's desire for an elegant, uncluttered set. The style and look of fashion runways also drew me in the direction of minimalist sculptures. Fashion runways tend to look like a large minimalist sculpture and I liked the idea of using minimalist sculptural elements and shapes as versatile scenic units (fig. 2.2, 2.3).

The final part of figuring out the aesthetic was deciding how the world of Harvard and Elle's perspective interacted. Most of the play takes place at Harvard and the Ivy League world of Harvard parties, offices, and halls of law. However, the look of an Ivy League world, does not really harmonize with the bright and energetic style of the music and play. The question about this interrelation was: does Elle impose herself on Harvard or does Harvard impose itself on Elle? Either way, the contrast is important for telling the story. Visually, this opposition is evoked by the changing locations of the play; therefore, having big ramifications on how the show would look. So the question again rises; should the design depict the literal setting of the world and therefore contrast with the music and style? Or, should the design evoke the overall mood and style of the musical?
The final concept I selected was on a quasi-classical inspired fashion runway. This concept was influenced first by the unity it would provide through all of Elle’s experiences: Greek sorority life, Ivy League academia, and legal courts. All of these places share a commonality of classical or neoclassical architecture. The other area of Elle’s life that was influential was her interest in and love for fashion. To bring this aspect of Elle’s life to the stage, I researched high-end department stores. I found the area of visual merchandising and store display design very useful. In many ways, stores mimic sets because they are both used to present ideas. The visual merchandizing research helped give me an idea of what aspects of fashion and clothing display I could incorporate into the design. I imagined Elle would see life as a shopping experience. As I explored my design and ideas, I found three visual words, which became my foundation for my design. Those words were: bubbly, colorful and collegiate.
**Research**

I began my research by finding images I though represented Elle, and images of Harvard and academia. The springboard for my Elle research was an image Ken gave me. It was an image from a Wella hair product advertisement (fig. 2.1). What we both liked about the image was the sense of whimsy, femininity, brightness and the sense there is a lot on her mind. I thought showing a complexity of thought in Elle's world is important because people's first reaction to this show is something akin to how people sometimes react to blonde women. Because the show appears to be all style and no substance, people assume the show is all fluff, and there is nothing beyond appearances. This is, in fact, a crucial theme of the show: looking beyond appearances, and realizing, despite a fun and bubbly personality, there is a depth of personality and humanity to its characters.

My next area of research was what exploring the idea of Elle's world as a fashion runway. Of the dozens of image's I considered, there were two which stood out to me. The first was an image from a recent Miss America runway (fig.2.2). What intrigued me about this image was the round portal or entry way and the open, flowing feel. I was also interested in idea of mixing specific details, like chandeliers with a more modern, minimal space to create a feeling of sleek elegance. Another design choice I felt created a sense of sleek elegance was the use of draped fabric and that was an idea I set aside to explore further. The second runway image that interested me was a runway with a
staircase and two different styles of catwalks (fig. 2.3). I liked that this runway had a more depth and architectural detail. I also really liked the idea of translucent building materials and put that idea aside, with draped fabric, for further thought.

Researching fashion runways also turned me in the direction of researching minimalist art, architecture and sculpture. Searching through many photos, there were, again, just two that resonated with me. The first was a minimalist interior (fig. 2.4). What I enjoyed about this room was the clean lines and uncluttered look. I could easily see this being an upscale Los Angeles restaurant or club she would frequent. The picture also further fueled my interest in translucent building materials and including lighting as a scenic element. This image led to a light bulb moment of sorts. While researching I was painfully aware of how many scene changes there were; this image made me realize the incorporation of translucent and semi-translucent building materials could allow the set to glow. The entire mood of the set could change with light and color. This change of lighting could also happen outside of and within the set and radiate out. The minimalist style also established the base for my color palette. White seemed to be the best answer for creating a world that felt light and airy, and lent to the versatility to the scenery.

The other minimalist image I found was a conceptual landscape model (fig. 2.5). I liked how the shapes seemed to pop up from the ground and had a clean neutrality. It could easily be multiple locations. I could see the same idea used to create levels and flexible playing spaces for the multiple scene changes.
Fig. 2.2. Research image - Miss America runway research (2006).

Fig. 2.3. Research image - Second runway research (Empty).
Fig. 2.4. Research image - Minimalist interior research (Modern).

Fig. 2.5. Research image - Concept landscape research (Delugan).
However, if too much of the stage floor was taken up with uneven surfaces, it could cause blocking problems. The cast size of the show was about thirty and I knew Ken was anticipating even larger cast for sound support in the space. Considering the size of the cast, plenty of room was needed for dance numbers and large group scenes.

After searching for images that felt like Elle and her world of West Coast style, I began researching the contrasting world of Harvard. By no accident, there probably isn't a style more contrasting to Elle's than Harvard. The first architectural element I noticed about Harvard was a lot of dark brick and colonial buildings - to be cliché, very old school. The interiors were also polar opposites to LA styles, dark, masculine, and traditional (fig. 2.7, 2.8, & 2.9). My first thought on making the Harvard world was abstracting elements such as bricks and ironwork. Abstracting those elements could make broad picture of the Ivy League world instead of very specific locations within the school and surrounding area. The iconic school gates had a lot of potential to create an overall Ivy League presence and yet work with minimalist elements (fig. 2.6). The other visual elements of Harvard that could mix well with a minimalist style were the windows. They are much more square and linear than Elle's world.

After my initial research and preliminary thumbnails and sketches, I had a clear picture of how the set would function, but I did not have any clearer idea of what the aesthetic would be. I decided to step back.
from the design, clear my mind about it, and hopefully refocus in a new direction. After some time, I began talks with Ken about the look. We were both pleased with the functionality of the set and agreed we had a good frame build an aesthetic on, but the look was still a mystery. Elle’s world in this musical was very fun, bouncy, rounded. I looked for images that evoked these words. Eventually, I found a word. The word that became the foundation of the look was “bubbly.” Elle and her world are bubbly, blonde, and positive. The image I found that best illustrated how the entire show and Elle felt to me was a multicolored graphic of a bubble pattern (fig. 2.10). I liked the playfulness of the pattern and the light airy feel it had. Those qualities and words I was looking for to describe Elle. This became my first major piece of aesthetic research.
It was also during this stepping back stage I realized a commonality between Elle's life in California and Harvard. Despite the differences between UCLA and Harvard, they are both university worlds. This idea of university worlds could provide a through line for the look and story. A unifying visual theme between both of these university worlds was Greek and classical influences. Elle's world in California is all about her sorority and her sisters. That element of Greek life for Elle meshed well with other images I found of Harvard and courtrooms. Moving away from the red brick walls of Harvard, I found other parts of Harvard, especially its law building, show classical influences (fig.2.11).

The last and final area of the story that I had nearly overlooked was the courtroom scenes towards the end of the play. Because the courtroom scenes importance to the plot, I felt it was important to show the influence of courtrooms in the design. The courtrooms are where the climax of the story takes place. They are also the scenes that show Elle's most vulnerable and, in turn, proud moments. As I researched courtrooms, I was pleased to find many courtrooms and civic buildings share the classical architectural influences present in Harvard and Elle's sorority life (fig. 2.12). I had found the second major piece is establishing the look of the show, a unifying visual theme for all three major aspects of Elle's life and world. The last part of finding the look was to combine the ideas bubbly and classical architecture.
Rehashing the design and reconsidering my research and ideas, the best way I could describe the look I'd arrived at was a classically inspired fashion runway. I liked the clean shapes and light styles of fashion runways and the versatility they could provide for staging multiple scenes quickly and I liked the unifying factor of classical architecture throughout all of the worlds that Elle encounters.

Fig. 2.11. Research image – Harvard law building (Krupa).

Fig. 2.12. Research image – courtroom (Supreme).
Fig. 2.13. Research collage – Additional style research.
Fig. 2.14. Research collage—Additional location research.
**Design Development**

Because of cinematic nature of the musical, with scene changes that felt more like film cross fades, there was no room for slow scene changes. Seamless transitions were essential to maintain the energy and momentum of the show. I also needed to be mindful of the fact that there would not be many stagehands to help move scenery. Because of the cast size, most of our student labor force was performing in the show. The cast would be available to help with transitions, but they also needed to change costumes and prepare for entrances. Again, the shifts and changes would need to be efficient. As mentioned, the Morgan is a bit tricky with moving scenery because of the limited room off stage left and right and the half fly system. I began figuring out the how to utilize the two-level super-structure. The second level could give an area for action to take place and direct attention away from the main floor during scene changes. The first problem I came across with the super structure was it created a dam. The structure would need to be quite large in order to be a playable space. No matter what side of the stage the structure was on, it would block access for other needed units. If the structure was placed center, it didn't leave enough clearance on both sides and lacked composition. The solution was placing the structure either stage left of right and make it a bridge or sorts, which could allow units to pass under it.

With a rough idea of the super structure and its placement, and serving as an anchor point for the rest of the design, I began to look into other means of moving scenery on and off. For quick scene changes, I felt several large rolling platforms, or wagons, were the best option. While one wagon was on stage, the others could be off stage and being loaded with scenic pieces and furniture. Then the off stage wagons could
come on while the other was making its way off to be reloaded. The first implementation of this idea was a rolling tongue unit on a track. This rolling unit needed to be tracked because it was intended to roll under the main superstructure unit and needed to align perfectly with the space underneath the span of the upper level. The size of the wagon was dictated by how wide the bridged space could be.

The other means of bringing on large scenic pieces, other than the wagons and tongue, was making sure everything had wheels. The major set pieces needing wheels were the benches used for the classroom and courtroom scenes. I chose benches because it would be the quickest way to bring on the large amount of seating necessary for those scenes. Benches were also a common feature in the large old classrooms of Harvard and as courtroom seating. We were fortunate to find a church in our community that had a number of old pews for sale. The benches were solid oak and therefore very heavy. Luckily, we had already planned the benches to roll. The rolling benches would also provide some versatility in staging. I imagined the rolling benches could be used in choreography or in changing views in a scene. For example, after the first classroom scene, the next scene takes place in the hall outside of the classroom. While in the final lines of the song, where Elle is thrown out of class, I imagined the benches turning around so her classmates’ backs’ were towards Elle. It could be like a camera shot that cut from the front view of the classroom, to the back view as Elle was thrown out the door.

The other staging elements introduced by the super structure were stairs. Multiple points of egress were necessary for getting actors on and off the second level and to keeping a continuous flow of movement. The advantage multiple staircases was levels
for staging tableaus and an interesting architectural and design element. The shape of the stairs could also help lend to the rounded, curvy aesthetic that Ken and I were looking for.

A functional element I had nearly forgotten was doors. The running idea with the design was having a flexible and neutral base onto which other more specific elements could be added to create specific locations. Because of this openness of setting, I had not considered adding doors. As Ken and I were working through this initial design phase, he asked about doors. In one of his later reading of the script, he'd noticed doors opening and closing were an important motif. I needed to design a means of having a door onstage. Again, the solution was a rolling unit. What I liked about a rolling door unit was it could help frame and establish implied rooms and buildings. When a door is visible, one assumes there is a wall attached to it, thus implying structure and walls.

With all of the moving and functional parts in mind: the superstructure and its placement, doors, wagons, staircases, rolling platforms and rolling units, I explored what combinations of scenic units I could use to create different settings. While in this process, I was mindful of what I called the rotation schedule; I needed to ensure I was allotting enough time for the wagons to go off, reload, and come back on. The show required thirty different floor plans. This meant there was going to be a lot of traffic and movement of set pieces that needed to be coordinated and correctly timed. Timing was essential so wagons could be unloaded and loaded or so other units had enough time to be reset and reconfigured for the next scene. Several locations were reoccurring, but because of the rotation schedule, I needed an accurate timeline of the scene shifts to make sure there were not going to be problems with overlapping shifts.
Sketches

In my sketches, I began with exploring what round and curved shapes I could use to frame the space. My first thought was creating a proscenium portal or frame. I liked the idea of this because it could lend a round and playful "flavor" we wanted for the show (fig. 2.15). This frame also showed promise as a projection surface. As the design developed, the portal idea went by the wayside. In discussions with the shop and considering the other needs of the show, such a large frame would take too much time and resources away from the other necessary elements.

At this point, I changed my focus to further exploring how the superstructure could serve as the main evocative form for the show. The need for masking the back stage areas necessitated some part of the superstructure serve as masking. The answer to this seemed to be a back wall of sorts on top of the structure. This wall could also be shaped and serve as a rounded sculptural element.

After considering making, elevating the second level became the next area to design. Walls framing the structure could have round cutaways that...
light could come from and the cutaways could serve as decorative elements. However, I felt adding large amount of base walls to this structure added too much visual mass would make the superstructure look solid and heavy. A more open solution and option was using columns to elevate the second level. The space between the columns would help give an open, airy look and would incorporate classical architectural elements into the design. However, there would still need to be at least a back wall to the bottom level that would conceal the backstage area.

One of the final design elements I explored about the superstructure was rounding out as much of the form as possible. From my early sketch, I felt that the long rectangle looked out of place. I went back to my research and found an image of columns that had an answer for rounding out the platform. The image was of a portico (fig. 2.16). When I saw it, I could see a rounded piece being added to a platform made from stock pieces we had available. Adding this rounded bump to the front of the large unit would soften the hard edge of the rectangular stock platforms and widen the playing space by several feet.

**Digital white models**

With the footwork of my sketches done, I moved on to digital white models (fig. 2.17). In the white models, I explored more of the shapes and composition as well as more of the function. I started by rounding out all the shapes I had. I then added the functional elements I needed; staircases, masking, and doors. When I added the staircases, I could see I needed additional masking especially on the side with the back staircase leading off stage. In my white model phase, I also modeled all of my moving units, the door, wagons, and tongue. With those built, I was able to explore how all of the pieces would move and work together.
Fig. 2.17. White model – Early model exploration in Sketchup.
With a working model, I was also able to begin thinking about what surfaces I could make translucent. The first things I considered when looking for translucent surfaces was anything that was heavy feeling. The first thing was the main curved staircase. I based my stairs in the model off the images of the white staircase I found (fig 2.18). However, the stock staircase we had wasn't built the same way. Its frame was open but it had a lot of support bracing underneath. The solution was facing the treads of the staircase with semi translucent plastic sheeting. This plastic sheeting became the material I used to lighten up other areas such as the surrounding wall of the spiral staircase. Any other solid wall I had was also subject to as much slicing and dicing as it could handle in order to bring light through it and retain structural integrity.

The more I worked on the model and developed my ideas, the more I found myself going back to my minimalist interior research (fig. 2.4). What I appreciated most about this image was the inspiration it gave me for cutouts and the possibility of lighting the cutouts. As mentioned earlier, lighting was something that would be very important to quickly changing the mood and scenes of the show.

In the white model phase, I also began to explore the projection surface. I needed to be conscious of placing them somewhere that would work with the position of the
projectors. I worked with Kenny Driggs and Bruce Duerden, the projection designer and lighting designer, a lot on this topic. They informed me the best positions for projectors were the battens of the fly system. With this information, I decided some surface that could hang from the battens along with the projectors was best. Looking at the composition of the space there was a big visual hole stage left. I thought the projection surfaces, whatever they were going to look like, could help fill that gap and balance the composition of the set. With this position in the air, the projection surfaces became more like screens. The clear choice for screens’ shape was round. I also thought these screens could be on tracks and move up and down, left and right to change composition for different scenes. My first approach was three disks all of the same size. However, with them all the same size, they overpowered everything else. The solution was to have a variety of size with the three disks and design as stationary on the stage left side (fig. 2.19). Ken liked the bubbly shape of the screens and remarked that these could be almost used as Elle’s thought bubbles. This idea became a useful concept for Kenny’s projection designs.

Fig. 2.19. White model – Revised white model exploration.
Final Design

Superstructure

For the final design of the superstructure, the top platform was rounded out and a landing added for the curved staircase, and a circular staircase added to the stage left side. Along the back escape stairs, a large partial circle was attached as a facade that acted as masking (fig. 2.20). The span of the bridge in the middle of the structure was dependent of the strength of the materials available and proper construction to ensure stability. The span of the bridge from which the tongue would emerge turned out to be ten feet, as was originally designed and proved an easy challenge to engineer and solve. Along the back of the unit, where the bridge opened, sliding hanging doors were added to conceal the back stage action, but also to serve as functioning doors for entrances on and off the stage and doors for other locations such as Elle’s dorm room closet (fig 2.21).

I chose a more streamlined Tuscan style column versus an Ionic or Doric column because they coherent with the other minimalist design elements. I chose to have the columns painted like marble to evoke a more classical style. I decided against having solid surfaces between the columns. Instead, I chose to drape white fabric between them. This created a versatile and pleasant surface that took light well and could change colors via light. The draped fabric also helped maintain a light, open appearance and spoke to the feminine perspective of the show with the draperies’ soft shapes. It was important the play look feminine, but not like a "boudoir" as Ken put it. The play is from a female perspective but at the same time, the set needed to communicate Elle's encounters with world dominated by hardness and masculinity (fig. 2.22). It was important to me the design look beautiful and strong, like a well-dressed and confident woman.
Fig. 2.20 Elevation – Front elevation showing large circle masking on left and doors center.
Fig. 2.21. Rendering – Watercolor and ink rendering.
Floor

The floor treatment was something I struggled with for quite some time. There was already a large amount of white surfaces on the stage, and I was concerned unifying the superstructure and floor with white would become overpowering and difficult to light. I also didn't want to overuse the marble paint treatment on the columns and make the marble visually stale. The solution was a pattern of circles that had a lot of playful energy and looked modern and chic. The shapes and pattern also didn’t detract from the other elements and blended in nicely because they were slender and graceful. For color, I felt it should be darker, but it couldn't be too dark or else it would not stand out from the black floor on which it was painted. I liked some of the darker shades of purple I was working with already in in the veining of the marble and as an accent color. When I painted a test on the floor, contrasted nicely against the black. A light spatter of dark purple and then light purple went over the base color to break it up and give the lighting designer some flexibility to accentuate it in certain scenes. (fig. 2.22).

Fig. 2.22 Paint elevation – Floor paint elevation.
Units

The other units for the show; the tongue, wagons, and door, were all subject to the same rounding out and classical makeover as the superstructure. For the tongue and wagon, instead of having them completely round, as I first though, a round lip was added to the front of square stock platforms. Not only did this round out the look of the tongue and wagon, but also added an additional three feet of length to the playing space. The rolling round unit was small enough that it could remain round and was made of stock platforms as well.

The door needed to open both ways for uses in different scenes. Because it was used in multiple scenes, it needed to easily roll. For the look, I found a graphic of a classical doorway (fig. 2.23) I appreciated the cleanness of the lines and shapes and felt it had a classical style and the modern sleek vibe I was going for. The door also was originally designed with removable panels to create different looks for the door. The first look was with no panels so the door could be seen through. The second look used semi-translucent sheeting panels and could be lit for ambiance and provide masking. The final was bars for the jail scene. However, the panels were difficult to change out, and it was decided to leave the semi-translucent panels in for the duration of the show.

Fig. 2.23. Research image – Door (Renaissance).
Individual Scenes

Exterior of the Delta Nu House

The first scene is at the Delta Nu house sorority house in UCLA. For this scene, the only units I chose to use were the door unit and the superstructure. In the staging of the scene, Ken used the stairs heavily as the Delta Nu sisters ran through the house celebrating for Elle’s coming proposal. The projections Kenny used were a Delta Nu logo of his own design and some other bright bubbly shapes at collegiate lettering motifs.

From top. Fig. 2.24, 2.25, & 2.26. Production Photos – Delta Nu house exterior and details.
Old Valley Mall and Boutique

For the rapid change to the mall, the tongue unit rolled out from under the superstructure revealing Elle in a dress boutique. This gave time for the sorority sisters to run down off then enter the new location. The rolling reveal was also a star entrance, as Elle gracefully and seamlessly appeared (fig 2.28).

Above, Fig. 2.27. Production Photo.
Old Valley Mall.

Right, Fig. 2.28. Production Photo.
Elle’s entrance in the dress boutique.
The next major change in location was to a courtyard restaurant. Again, this was an extremely fast transition from the Delta Nu house. Warner picks up Elle at the front door of the house, they have a few lines and then they take their seats at the restaurant. To achieve this transition, one of the rolling wagons came on stage preset with a table and chairs. The door for the Delta Nu house rolled back into the exterior position by the superstructure. With the outdoor setting, it was a great opportunity to show time of day with projection and lights.

Fig. 2.29. Production Photo – Courtyard restaurant.
Country Club

After returning home from her devastating date with Warner, Elle tracks down her parents at their country club. This was not only a rapid scene change but also a drastic change of location that lasted only for a moment and was not revisited. The solution for keeping the scene simple and uncluttered was clearing the stage and having a golf cart come on, driven by Elle’s parents. For projections, Kenny developed a golf course animation that worked in conjunction with the actors’ movement to create the illusion of a golf ball being hit and sinking a hole in one. Bruce washed the back wall with green light to give the impression of a sweeping golf green.

Fig. 2.30. Production Photo – Country club.
Harvard Law School Admissions Office

Elle is eventually admitted to Harvard Law. For the scene in the admissions office, the stage was cleared to make way for the UCLA cheer squad that Elle uses to woo the admissions panel. The specific location was implied with the use of a projected Harvard crest and an image of an architectural abstraction Kenny developed. At the top of the scene, the colors of the projections were red and somber, like the halls of Harvard. When Elle entered, the projections changed to colorful vibrant versions of themselves, contrasting with the conservative Harvard look, as Elle persuaded the admissions panel.

Fig. 2.31. Production Photo – Harvard Law School admissions office.
Harvard Yard

After being admitted, Elle finds herself in the Harvard yard waiting to begin classes and meets several members of her cohort. In anticipation of the scene coming after it, Callahan’s classroom, the stage needed to be relatively clear. In order to make clearing the stage quick, a simple bench was used with Projections designed by Kenny. Kenny created an illustration of Harvard buildings and trees that cross faded from the admissions office. Bruce’s touch to the scene was green light with tree/branch gobos to create the feeling of being outdoors.

Fig. 2.32. Production Photo – Harvard yard.
*Callahan’s Classroom*

Immediately after the scene in the yard, Callahan’s classroom appears. This was one of heavier scene changes because eight heavy benches needed to appear on stage all at once. Four benches entered preloaded with actors seated on the tongue, rolling from under the superstructure. The other four benches had casters and rolled on freely and into the classroom from onstage and into the classroom formation.

Fig. 2.33. Production Photo – Callahan’s classroom.
The Hair Affair

After the classroom scene and a smaller scene in the school hallway outside of it, the scene changed to the Hair Affair, the salon of Elle’s soon to be friend Paulette. The salon was created by bringing in a manicure station on the tongue, a hair cutting station and salon chair in on the wagon, a rolling counter unit. The from the house right voms, a hair-drying chair was brought on stage. The rolling door unit went to the edge of the stage to become the door to the salon.

Fig. 2.34. Production Photo – The Hair Affair.
Harvard Law Party

After consulting with Paulette on a costume for a party, Elle arrives at the party to find she’s been tricked by Vivenne. The party scene, presumably at Vivenne’s house, was created by using the counter from the last scene, and a rolling disk unit that could act as seating for a party but not require a dozen chairs being brought on. Kenny and Bruce greatly contributed to the scene with moody lighting, animations, and moving lights.

Fig. 2.35. Production Photo – Harvard Law party.
Elle’s Room

Elle is humiliated, leaves the party, and is discovered outside in the bold by Emmett. He gives her his jacket and escorts her back to her room. Elle’s room is where the audience sees into Elle’s personal life. Even though she is at Harvard, she is trying to hold on to her identity, and she’s still a little immature. Her room is a scattered mess. Emmett takes this chance to encourage her to clean up her act and get serious about her education. Elle’s room was established with bedroom furniture that was loaded on the wagon and tongue after the Hair Affair. Her room is, of course, pink, in line with how adamant Elle is about pink being her favorite color. The one particular item of set dressing I particularly enjoyed having in the room was a collection of vintage pink hats. It was a small touch, but I felt it was something Elle would have appreciated with her fashion background.

Fig. 2.36. Production Photo – Elle’s room.
Trailer Park

After deciding to get serious about her education, Elle finds herself helping Paulette recover her dog from Dewey, Paulette’s abusive ex-boyfriend. This was another scene where the stage needed to be relatively clear in anticipation of a large dance number for the closing scene of act one. A projected sign Kenny designed established the trailer park. Small scenic elements were added by cross over characters, presumably the other residents of the trailer park: a stolen bike and bags of garbage. Dewey’s trailer was implied by the house left vom.

Fig. 2.37. Production Photo – Trailer park.
Exercise Video and Boston Women’s Correctional Facility

The second act begins with Callahan’s legal team reviewing a video. The video is actually a dance number lead Brooke Wyndam, an exercise and fitness mogul, is on trial for murdering her husband (fig. 2.38). Callahan, his firm, and his interns are defending her case. The scene alternates between Callahan’s group and the video. The actors in the video freeze as if paused while Callahan and his group talk. Eventually the scene seamlessly shifts from the video to the Boston Women’s Correctional facility (fig. 2.39). Brooke’s background fitness actors become sweaty, gross female inmates. Primarily lights and projections created the proper effect of a video being frozen and the rapid transition from fitness film to the correctional facility.

Fig. 2.38. Production Photo – Exercise video.
Fig. 2.39. Production Photo – Boston Women’s Correctional Facility.
To thank Emmett for his encouragement, Elle takes him shopping and helps him update his shabby, corduroy style. A rolling store unit with two well-dressed mannequins created the changing room of high-end men’s department store. The mannequins were dressed to match the costume style of the show. During the scene, the department store staff helped Emmett change in the dressing room. The dressing room design kept Emmett visible for the number so dialog could continue. The doors to the changing room were high enough to conceal the change to keep Emmett’s change and make a dramatic reveal of his new look.

Fig. 2.40. Production Photo – Hansen and Harkness.
Courtroom

Eventually Elle, Callahan, and the other interns have their day in court defending Brooke. The courtroom scene was the largest ensemble scene. Every actor was on stage. To create the courtroom, the eight benches rolled on individually and created an aisle to form the court’s public gallery seating. This was easily facilitated because the large amounts of actors and actresses entering the scene brought on the benches. On the second level of the superstructure, additional gallery seating was added. Additional tables and chairs were added in front of the courtrooms implied bar for the defense and the plaintiffs. The final unit for the scenes was the judge’s stand. It had seating for the judge, the court clerk and the witnesses (fig. 2.42).

Fig. 2.41. Production Photo – Courtroom.
Fig. 2.42. Production Photo – Judge’s stand detail.
Chutney’s Bathroom

Everyone in the court travels to scene of the crime in Chutney’s bathroom. Elle proves Chutney, Brooke’s stepdaughter, was the murderer. This was a massive and quick change. The judge’s stand revolved revealing a bathroom on the backside of the unit complete with toilet and sink. As the unit revolved, the ensemble quickly moved all of the benches off stage. Kenny designed a clever set of projection images consisting of crime scene tape and a body outline that helped finish the look of a crime scene.

Fig. 2.43. Production Photo – Chutney’s bathroom.
Harvard Graduation

Elle wins her case and graduates as valedictorian. Once again, the benches came on stage to make up the audience for the graduation while the second level of the superstructure acted as a podium for Elle and the graduation officiants. The entering actors quickly hung three Harvard crest banners from the second level railing to give a ceremonial mood for the occasion. Kenny mirrored this in his projections by having the crest appear as the largest emphasis in his projections.

Fig. 2.44. Production Photo – Harvard graduation.
Works Cited


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Violet

Book and lyrics by Brian Crawley

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Directed by Ken Risch

Costume Design by Spencer Potter

Set Design by Chelsea Richards

Lighting Design by Kenny Driggs

Utah State University Department of Theatre Arts

Caine Lyric Theatre

Spring 2013
**Introduction**

*Violet* was my first costume design for Utah State. Prior to this, I had worked professionally as a designer and assistant costume designer. I was eager to work on this musical because there were a wide variety of characters to create. The convention of this musical was having actors play multiple roles. I felt creating so many people while using the same actors as foundations for the characters would be an exciting challenge. I also liked I would be creating realistic characters with backstories and emotional baggage. I enjoy finding subtle character details and illustrating them through the psychology of dress and appearance.

In addition, this show struck me as an opportunity to tell the story of social change in the 1960’s through costume. The changes were not the drastic changes in the 1960’s as seen in Mod and Hippie style tribes, but the nuanced changes in American society. The changes seen are transitions from a postwar golden era and the Camelot years to an era of doubt confusion and hurt with the beginning of the Vietnam War.

**Synopsis**

Set in 1964 in the Deep South during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, *Violet* follows the growth and enlightenment of a bitter young woman accidentally scarred by her father. In hopes that a TV evangelist can cure her, she embarks on a journey by bus from her sleepy North Carolina town to Oklahoma. Along the way, she meets a young black soldier who teaches her about beauty, love, courage and what it means to be an outsider. (Violet)
**Character Breakdown**

- **VIOLET** - A young rural North Carolina woman whose face was scarred in a childhood accident. She is stubborn and prickly, but filled with equal parts hope and obsession that she may heal and be made beautiful.

- **FLICK** - An African-American soldier; a dreamer and go-getter. He doesn’t enjoy the army, but enjoys the respect it garners him. There is something gentle, good about him, not to be interpreted or confused with weakness or lack of authority.

- **MONTY** - A paratrooper and Flick’s friend from basic training. Rough around the edges. Self-consumed, but not necessarily purposefully so. Fighting his own demons.

- **YOUNG VI** - Not quite as guarded or prickly as her older self, but still tough and stubborn. She has a keen curiosity and the rough edges of being brought up solely by her father.

- **FATHER** - A simple, widowed man who lovingly raises his daughter alone doing the best he can with the little knowledge and resources he has to do so. Stern but friendly, smart but uneducated. Accidentally scars Violet’s face while he is chopping wood.

- **PREACHER** - An impassioned, theatrical man who preaches with all the bravado he can muster. Once had a true healing touch but has lost it in his quest to become a showman. Dismissive and egotistical. Actor doublings include: Bus Drive, Rufus, Radio Singer, and Bus Driver 4.
• EARL - A strange character on the greyhound bus who sneaks smokes in the bathroom and is carrying a smelly suitcase he claims holds a flea circus. Actor doublings include: Radio Soloist, Waiter, Leroy Evans, Mechanic, and Bus Driver

• GOSPEL SOLOIST - A member of the volunteer choir that sings for the Preacher’s telecast. Sings for God with passion and power. Actor doubles as Landlady and Woman Knitting.

• MABEL - A talkative woman on the greyhound bus who shares stories of her many husbands and how she loves gray eyes. Actor doubles as Music Hall Singer and Woman With Fan.

• OLD LADY - A former beauty in her heyday. Staunch, tired and frustrated with life. Actor doubles as Hotel Singer and Old Lady 2.

• VIRGIL - The Preacher’s assistant. Knows the smoke & mirrors of the Preacher’s show and must begrudgingly deal with anyone who might derail it. Actor doublings include: Billy Dean, Creepy Guy, Radio Singer, and Bus Driver

(Violet)

**Design Concept & Objectives**

I greatly appreciated Ken’s concept and analysis for Violet. What he saw in this story was not only the story of the girl Violet, but the unique story of America in the early 1960’s. America had just concluded the Korean War, and the Vietnam War was looming on the horizon. The assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 was also a painful defining moment in American history. Ken clearly remembered seeing the nation “torn and tattered after the Kennedy assassination.” The nation was confused and hurt after the abrupt end of the Camelot Years. Subsequently, this amplified the waves of
social changes American saw in the 1960’s. Many of these elements are seen in the script, especially changing attitudes towards race and interracial relationships.

With these social changes in mind, I wanted to tell the story of the time through the costumes. First, Ken and I both saw Violet as a symbol of America – torn, hurt, and bitter. I also felt a distinct change between the different groups of passengers accompanying Violet. The departure group seemed a little more wholesome and reassured; however, the returning group of passengers felt angry and agitated. This was interesting because the attitudes of the bus crowds directly contrast Violet’s inner state on each part of the journey and reflect the changes in American society.

A valuable piece of literary research was the short story “The Ugliest Pilgrim” by Doris Betts, the short story the musical is based on. Although the story was only twenty-nine pages long, it offered tremendous insight into Violet’s character. Violet tells her story in a first person perspective and most of the story is her inner dialogue and thoughts about the people she sees on her journey. From her observations about other people’s appearances, it was easy to see how aware she was about her own appearance. The diction of her inner dialogue is also very frank and sharp. Her judgment of others and her diction were the biggest clues to her personality and her hurt.

The first area I drew visual inspiration from was old photos from the late 1950’s and early 1960’s I found during online image searches. I was drawn to color quality of the images but also the sense of nostalgia. I didn’t know any of the people in the photos, but when I was imagining the lives of the characters, there was something about the families and people in the photos I felt a connection to. The photos also showed the happier times that were lost later in the decade. The biggest emotional response I had to
the pictures was a sense of loss. Those happy times were over and those people’s lives had likely changed like the characters’ lives had. It helped put me in a creative mindset to develop characters dealing with loss and tell the nations story of loss through those characters (fig. 3.1).

As mentioned, I was drawn to the color quality of the old photos. Some were faded and cool. The cool photos had a sense of calm and memory; they also felt cleaner and neater to me. Other photos were more warm and yellowed. Those felt nostalgic but also a little more dirty and grungy. Overall, I chose more of the cool and faded colors to use as the base color palette for the show. Those colors were faded blues and greens, tan, and gray. I then chose the warmer grungier colors for the characters who reflected the changing attitudes in American society. I saw color as an important unifying element in my design. Many of the actors would be playing multiple roles so I wanted a limited color palette to tie everyone and everything together.

I kept in mind there was a build-heavy show following mine. Therefore, I made it my goal to pull as much as possible from stock while at the same time maintaining my vision for the characters, and keep shop resources available for the larger show. At first, I found this challenging. It was hard to sift through our large costume stock piece by piece and find exactly what I wanted. With the help of my advisor, Nancy Hills, we started pulling racks of costumes based on color and style. I then used those as the general foundation costumes to develop the show. With that initial costume pull completed, it became much easier to piece together the show and find nearly exact matches for what I had drawn.
Fig. 3.1. Research collage – Old photo inspiration.
My basic approach in creating the characters was to have a base costume with other pieces added to distinguish between characters. The reason for this choice was to keep my color palette tight and keep the design unified throughout the play. Using base costumes also facilitated the many rapid costume changes for the show and the transformations between characters. This proved to be a cost effective way of costuming a larger musical cast while creating a broad range of characters.

**Research**

I began researching clothing from the mid to late 1950’s rather than the exact date of the play, 1964, or early 60’s. Most of the characters came from poor, rural backgrounds. They wouldn’t have the latest fashions and would likely be wearing second hand and well-worn clothing. Consequently, I found the socioeconomic context of the play very influential in my design.

**Period Style**

For most of the characters, I worked between the years 1947 and 1954. Some of the more wealthy characters might have a little more updated look, but I felt most would be wearing clothes from this earlier time rage because they were not high fashion and would probably be wearing older styles. However, within this rage of years, I avoided anything that would have looked overdressed and elegant, such as the New Look, Christian Dior’s fashion movement during the late 40’s and 50’s. For the women, I chose to use more narrow skirts that were characteristic for the period and used an occasional fuller skirt (Tortora and Eubank 508). Necklines at this period were also very plain, rounded, square, and cut close to the neck or slightly lower (Tortora and Eubank 508). At this time, the sleeves were very fit the arm closely, like a small cap sleeve. Other sleeve styles, like
medium or long sleeves were cut like men’s sleeves but, again, fit much more closely (Tortora and Eubank 511). Because the play takes place in summer, I also chose to work with summer style dresses. Even though pants were becoming fashionable for women during this time (Tortora and Eubank 512), I felt the characters of this play would probably still be more traditional in their values and wearing skirts rather than pants. Hats were also a costume element I wanted to explore. I saw hats as a quick and effective way of changing characters. Hats of the period ranged from wide brimmed to narrow brimmed hats. During this time, women would wear hats for most occasions, especially when traveling (fig. 3.2) (Tortora and Eubank 515). Footwear was characterized by high heels, rounded toes, ankle-straps, sling back, very pointed toes, and open toed shoes (fig. 3.3) (Tortora and Eubank 515).

Fig. 3.2. Above, Research image – period hat styles (Tortora and Eubank 515).

Fig. 3.3. Left, Research image – period shoe styles (Tortora and Eubank 515).
For the men of this play, other than the soldiers, the look I wanted was much more casual. None of the men would be wearing suits and would be wearing casual trousers and shirts. I decided to be a little more lenient about the cut and style of the pants and focused more on colors and materials. Between 1947 and 1960, men’s trousers were typically khaki colored or made of cotton weaves and twill weaves (Tortora and Eubank 522). During the postwar era, men’s casual and sportswear shirts were knit shirts or button down. Collars of that time tended to be wider and similar in cut to dress shirts. Men’s casual shirts were often colored and patterned (Tortora and Eubank 522). Even though these were styles closer to the early 1950’s, I figured the men of this play would be especially behind in their dress and style. As with the women, hats were also a popular accessory for men. Styles worn by men included trilbies and fedoras. For the summer season, these hats could also be made of straw (Tortora and Eubank 523).

Another valuable historic clothing source was *Everyday Fashions of the Fifties as Pictured in Sears Catalogs*. I found this source useful because it had a broad range of styles for men, women, and children. It also spanned the decade of the 1950’s and illustrated the changes in styles. I also thought the Sears catalog would have been a common clothing source for people living in rural areas. In addition, I felt the middle class styles and values of America would be well represented in the clothing provided by Sears.
The best resource I found for researching rural North Carolina was the State Archives of North Carolina. The State Archive of North Carolina has started an online photo-stream of thousands of images spanning the state’s history. The archives had many candid images of average people leading everyday lives and doing some of the uniquely North Carolinian activities specifically mentioned in the script, such as picking galax leaves. There were also many photos of main streets and neighborhoods that helped give me a sense of Violet’s world specifically. The photos also gave me an idea of where some of the other passengers might be coming from via Tennessee or Arkansas (fig. 3.4).

Fig. 3.4. Research collage – Rural North Carolina.
Military Uniforms

This was my first show requiring military uniforms. I wanted to make them as accurate as possible out of respect for past and current service members. I also wanted that richness of detail for the actors. I wanted the men playing Flick and Monty to have an understanding of what all the insignia meant and let them have that as a resource for their individual character development.

I assumed there would be an abundant amount of information available for U.S. Military uniforms. Indeed, there was; however, specific information and images for the years between the Korean War and the Vietnam War were scant. Comparing images of Korean War and Vietnam War servicemen, the difference is very clear. From my reading about the uniforms, I was able to discern that there was a distinct choice to change the uniforms rather than a gradual evolution as seen in other uniform transitions. There was even a date and specific reference for the change. In September of 1954, the army adopted the Army Green uniform in shade 44. In 1956, this green uniform was available in at Quartermaster Clothing Sale Stores. 1956 and 1961 were transition years that allowed for the transitioning and wearing out of old khaki uniforms. Finally in September 1961, the U.S. Army made the Army Green Uniform shade 44 mandatory (Cole 99). However, the images were not surfacing. I decided to use another tactic and try a little crowd-sourced research. To do this, I simply posted a Facebook post asking if any of my friends if they knew anyone who had served during this time or if any of my friends with military experience might know any resources. I also asked if any of them could help me discern what patches soldiers wore when stationed at Fort Chaffee Arkansas – Monty and
Flick’s destination. I did not expect much to come from this, but there was at least a chance something might. That something did come, and it was a very valuable resource.

To my surprise, my friend Susan Ertel not only knew about Fort Chaffee – it was decommissioned in 1959 - but it was literally the backyard of her childhood home. In addition to this, her brother, Robert McKinney is a retired Army Lt. Colonel military intelligence specialist and now an amateur war historian. Although this was not Robert’s area of specialty, he was able to point me towards a book that was very helpful and gave me a PDF about military service uniforms. The book was *U.S. Army Uniforms of The Cold War 1948-1973* by Shelby Stanton. The book was available as an eBook and easy enough to come by, but because it was categorized as a Cold War book, it had slipped my attention; however, the Cold War was in fact a time period that blanketed the Korean War and the Vietnam War, thus the information was entirely relevant to my research. The PDF Robert gave me is a publicly available document from the U.S. Army Center of Military History. It gives a brief history of military uniforms from the late 18th century to 2006.

*Uniform Details*

**General Period Uniform**

As previously mentioned, the U.S. Army had a transitional period where it phased out the olive drab uniform (fig. 3.5) from the Korean War and adopted a green uniform. This transition was particularly confounding in my research. I found multiple sources with conflicting information but ultimately found the clear answer from the U.S. Army Center of Military History. This clarification from their sources explained the conflicting images and gave clarified what the general uniform of the time period looked like.
The initial reason for the change in army uniforms was a growing philosophy that took root shortly after World War II. The philosophy was officers and enlisted men’s uniforms should be the same and that distinction between ranks be shown only with insignia (Cole 99).

The new uniform featured a single-breasted jacket with brass buttons, roll collar, and notched lapels. On the jacket, collar disks were worn in addition to unit insignia on the shoulder. A tan shirt and black tie were worn with the jacket. Black socks, black lower quarter shoes, an army green service cap with black visor or army green garrison cap completed the uniform (fig. 3.6) (Cole 99).

Fig. 3.5. Research image - Drab uniform 1942 (Cole 80). Fig. 3.6. Research Image - Green uniform 1956 (Cole 100).
Rank, Unit, and Insignia Information

Rank Information

The U.S. Army revised its rank structure in 1958. The change featured enlisted grades or ranks numbered from E-1 to E-9. This ranking system, with minor changes, is the same structure and same rank insignia currently used by the U.S. Army (fig. 3.7).

The script was somewhat vague when it came to details about Flick and Monty’s rank and other military information. The script mentions Flick is a “second rocker sergeant.” Because I couldn’t find a definitive answer, I inferred that “rocker” referred to the small curved shapes at the bottom of a sergeant’s patch and thus implied that Flick held the rank of Sergeant First Class. Monty does directly state he is a corporal paratrooper, and that rank insignia was easy to find.

![Army Enlisted ranks](Cole 101)
Insignia

In order to determine what insignia Monty and Flick would be wearing, it was necessary to determine what units had been stationed at the base they were from. As previously mentioned, Fort Chaffee was Flick and Monty’s final destination. They were only stopping at the town named Fort Smith, which is the closest town to Fort Chaffee (Ertel).

The next challenge was researching which units had been stationed at the fort. This was complicated because Fort Chaffee was repurposed many times over the years. Fort Chaffee, originally called Camp Chaffee, was built in 1941 and was an active training camp as well as a POW camp from 1942 to 1946 (Radcliff). In 1956, it was re-designated Fort Chaffee and became the Home of U.S. Army Training Center, Field Artillery. In 1958, the fort gained a small amount of celebrity when Elvis Presley was trained there after being drafted (Radcliff). In 1959, the training center was moved to Fort Sill, and from 1960 to 1961, the fort was the home of the 100th Infantry Division. After 1961, Fort Chaffee was deactivated and placed on caretaker status only to be used occasionally through the 1970’s (Radcliff). A problem arose. The play was set in 1964; a time Fort Chaffee had no activity. Operating with the little information I found, I concluded the best route to determining Flick and Monty’s unit insignia was to use the last known division stationed at Fort Chaffee, the 100th Infantry Division. This choice was supported by the script because it mentions Flick and Monty are heading to Fort Smith to train soldiers and the 100th Infantry Division is also called the 100th Training Division.
The major insignia I needed for the uniforms was the unit patch insignia. After a soldier's rank, the unit patch insignia is the second most prominent insignia worn on the uniform. In addition to the shoulder sleeve insignia, there are other distinctive unit insignia worn; however, those are for different purposes and occasions other than general day wear.

Fig. 3.8. Research image - Insignia placement guide (United).
Individual Characters

Violet

Character analysis and concept

Again, Ken and I saw Violet as a symbol for a damaged and hurt United States after the Kennedy assassination. This symbol was appropriate and feasible because Violet herself is worn and emotionally scarred in addition to her physical scar. Because of her poor rural background, she would have second hand, homemade, or hand me down clothing. I also saw Violet as perhaps the poorest character in the play. Designing her, I felt it important to avoid obvious or clichéd representations of her as a symbol of the U.S. That meant no red, white, and blue motif’s and no use of an American flag as a garment or part of a garment. The reason for this choice was to be respectful to the flag and emblems of the U.S. but also to avoid Violet looking like something from a 4th of July parade or rally. The solution to violet’s color palette was having her simply in blue. The director and I both felt this was a subtle and appropriate approach because it is a symbolic color for the U.S. but it also blues common association with sadness. It was important that the color also be faded and worn to reflect Violet’s faded and worn life and the faded and worn hopes of the United States.
Character research

Fig. 3.9. Research collage – Violet inspiration.
Fig. 3.10. Rendering - Violet watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Flick

Character analysis and concept

From Flick’s behavior and language in the script, one can tell he is a gentleman and a scholar. He is well mannered, respectful, and treats violet with compassion when others don’t. He is also an African American man holding a non-commissioned officer’s rank in a world caught in the midst of segregation and the Civil Rights movement. Although the US Military was desegregated in 1948 by Executive Order 9981 (Executive), it is safe to assume there were still racial tensions in the U.S. military. Tensions would be especially high in the South, where Flick was from. I interpreted this to mean Flick was a high caliber soldier. I imagine he faced challenges every step of the way towards his rank and had to be perfect and exacting to overcome the obstacles thrown at him as an African American moving up the rank ladder. I felt this would especially show in his appearance because of heightened scrutiny against him. I imagined his uniform would be perfectly pressed, each medal perfectly aligned and polished, his hair groomed, his shoes polished. Everything about Flick’s appearance would be exactly as the military handbook said it should be. This distinction is important because it is direct contrast to the other soldier in the play Monty.
Character research

Fig. 3.11. Research collage – Flick inspiration.
**Insignia**

Flick holds the rank of Sergeant First Class (fig. 3.13). His unit patch is for the 100th Training Division (fig. 3.12). As part of the 100th Training Division, Flick was part of the Infantry Branch. Two crossed rifles indicated the branch insignia (fig.3.14). For an enlisted non-commissioned officer, there would be a brass disk backing the rifles. This was worn on the left jacket lapel with an accompanying U.S. insignia on the right also with a brass backing. These were the main insignia needed to be the base of Flick’s uniform and have it as accurate as possible.

Fig.3.12. Research image. 100th Training Division unit patch (Institute).

Fig.3.13. Research image. Sergeant First Class insignia (Institute).

Fig.3.14. Research image. Infantry branch insignia (Institute).
Fig. 3.15. Rendering - Flick watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Monty

Character analysis and concept

In contrast to the gentleman solider Flick, Monty is haphazard and impulsive. He is very much a rebel-without-a cause type. Monty is a corporal paratrooper. I thought it was an interesting detail that Monty was a paratrooper. What does this detail say about the character? I think the answer was straightforward; he’s willing, eager, and able to throw himself out of a plane. To me this also meant Monty was a thrill seeker, a daredevil, and a rule breaker. I thought this would reflect in his uniform by various small breaks in uniform regulation. For instance, having his sleeves rolled up and shirt untucked while he was traveling. I thought he’d also have his hat cocked a little and in general try hard to look the part of cool and casual.

Character research

Fig.3.16. Research collage – Monty inspiration.
Insignia

As a Green Beret, Monty has a slightly different set of insignia and patches due to his specialized training. His rank as corporal is below that of Flick’s rank as Sergeant First Class (fig. 3.17). On his left sleeve, he wore the patch of The Army Special Forces Group. The group was established in 1955. In 1958, the Airborne patch was added to the uniform (Fig 3.18) (Institute). As part of the Special Forces, two crossed arrows indicate his branch insignia (fig. 3.20). For an enlisted non-commissioned officer, there would be a brass disk backing the arrows. This was worn on the left jacket lapel with an accompanying U.S. insignia on the right also with a brass backing. Also as part of the Special Forces, the major difference in his uniform is his green beret. On his beret, he wore the beret flash of 6th Special Forces Group (fig 3.19). The 6th Special Forces Group was active from 1963 to 1971. I chose the 6th because it was stationed at Fort Bragg North Carolina and was thus relevant to the play (6th). The final specific insignia that Monty needed was a paratrooper qualification badge (fig 3.21). Soldiers earned these by training and specializing in certain areas. One of the areas is parachuting and thus Monty needed one.

Fig.3.17. Research image. Corporal insignia (Institute).

Fig.3.18. Research image – Special Forces shoulder patch (Institute).
Fig. 3.19. Research image – 6th Special Forces beret flash (Institute).

Fig. 3.20. Research image – Special Forces branch insignia (Institute).

Fig. 3.21. Research image – Special Forces shoulder patch (Institute).
Fig. 3.22. Rendering - Monty watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Young Vi

Character analysis and concept

Young Violet, or Young Vi as she is referred to in the script, appears as a memory throughout the play. I wanted her colors to be a little more faded, dusty and ghostly than the other characters to emphasize she was a memory. Young Vi also goes through an interesting change during the play. In the beginning, Young Vi is sweet and playful, but after being scarred, she becomes hard and resentful. This mainly affects her relationship with her father. I chose this relationship as the avenue to illustrate Young Vi’s personality change. She started very much as a daddy’s girl. She adored him and looked up to him as a hero. Even shortly after being scarred, she still loves towards her father. Clothing wise, this meant she would be dressed in a way to emulate her father. She would be a Tomboy wearing pants, boots and a rope belt her dad made. She didn’t care about her appearance, only that she was with her father. As she grows and becomes more self-aware, especially about her appearance, Violet tries to distance herself from her father in her appearance and their relationship becomes strained. Dress wise, I took this as her trying to look more feminine and pretty, especially as an attempt to compensate for her scar. However, she is still a poor country girl and her clothing still reflects that inescapable aspect of her life.
Character research

Fig. 3.23. Research collage – Young Vi inspiration.
Fig. 3.24. Rendering - Young Vi watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Father

Character analysis and concept

Violet’s father is a hardworking farmer and loving father. Although he is somewhat gruff at times, he loves his daughter very much and longs to be able to give her more than their simple means can provide. He’s an honest, levelheaded, and hardworking man. He also appears as a memory throughout the play and I wanted him to have the same faded memory quality as Young Violet. Overall, I wanted him to look hardworking and respectable despite his poor rural background.

Character research

Fig.3.25. Research collage – Father inspiration.
Fig. 3.26. Rendering - Father watercolor and mixed media rendering.
**Preacher**

*Character analysis and concept*

The televangelist preacher Violet goes to see in Kansas is more of a showman than a preacher. A mix of Liberace and the gospel was the best way I could think to describe him. I did in fact base part of the design on Liberace’s sequin costumes and combined that style with the televangelist Leroy Jenkins. In the beginning, Violet doesn’t see he is a charlatan. She genuinely believes he can heal her scar. When he can’t, Violet confronts him, calls him out on his flashy act, and tells him all he needs is a few more touches and he can take his show to Vegas. However, the preacher has not always been a charlatan, and he was originally a humble preacher who genuinely believed in faith healing but got caught up in the glitz and glamor of televangelism. I illustrated change of character in his flashy jacket. At first, the audience sees him from the front with sequin lapels, nothing too extravagant. Later, as the sermon grows to a fever pitch, the preacher turns around and reveals an enormous sequin cross on the back of his jacket that glistens and flashes under the stage lights. Later, when he is alone with violet and confesses he’s lost touch with real faith, he takes off the jacket. A symbol of him putting away his television persona and exposing his own vulnerability in the form of a simple white shirt. The jacket was also a simple way to pop this character out from the chorus while he wore his base costume.
Character research

Fig. 3.27. Research collage – Preacher inspiration.
Fig.3.28. Rendering - Preacher watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Creepy Guy, Virgil, Radio Singer

*Character analysis and concept*

The character of the Creepy Guy at first sounds simplistic. He is a passenger on the returning bus, the bus that represents the changed and bitter America. I justified why he was creepy. It wasn’t because he was just a general creep but conjectured he maybe came back from war a paranoid and disturbed. It’s also indicated he’s smoking something other than tobacco. To create this character from his base costume, I added a military knit hat, and a trench coat. I was especially keen on the trench coat because I thought it would be interesting for him to enter looking like an exhibitionist of sorts. For the other character Virgil, the Preacher’s assistant, I added a bow tie and glasses. I saw Virgil as the humble, nerdish sidekick to the preacher and in the script; he is very much so with timid language. The final character was a radio singer. The radio singers appear as Violet falls asleep listening to the radio and materialize for a dream sequence. The song was country in style so I chose for them to wear western style shirts and hats.

*Character research*

![Image](image.png)  
*Fig.3.29. Research collage – Creepy Guy, Virgil, Radio Singer.*
Fig. 3.30. Rendering - Creepy Guy, Virgil, Radio Singer watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Mechanic and Bus Driver

Character analysis and concept

For the mechanic, I chose an A-line T-shirt which was worn under the base costume shirt, and coveralls that were pulled on over the base pants. The actor playing this role had some great tattoos on his arms that fit the character and I wanted to show them with the T-shirt. The other character was the bus driver. The bus driver was created simply adding a blue blazer and hat. For the drivers I wanted a general appearance that implied a uniform of an imaginary a bus line like Greyhound.

Character research

Fig.3.31. Research collage – Mechanic and Bus Driver inspiration.
Fig. 3.32. Rendering - Mechanic and Bus Driver watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Radio Singer, Billy Dean, Rufus, Bus Driver

Character analysis and concept

The radio singer was a repeat of the style mentioned earlier since they were part of a singing group. Billy Dean was the boy that Violet has sex with for the first time. He is the same age as Young Vi so he needed a more youthful appearance. To create this look I decided he should roll his cuffs, open his shirt and have an undershirt. I felt the unbuttoned look evoked youthfulness. Rufus was the Mechanic’s lackey. His look was created by adding a coverall and cap. Again, the Bus Driver was a simple blazer and hat.

Character research

Fig.3.33. Research collage – Radio Singer, Billy Dean, Rufus, Bus Driver inspiration.
Fig. 3.34. Rendering - Radio Singer, Billy Dean, Rufus, Bus Driver watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Leroy Evans, Waiter, Earl, Bus Driver

Character analysis and concept

Leroy Evan’s is one of the simple people from Spruce Pine, the town where the play begins. Violet resents him for staring at her scar. The characters diction and described dialect was very backwoods so I wanted him to look like the epitome of slovenly hill people. For this, he wore distressed overalls and a stained A-line T-shirt.

The next character was a waiter at the bus stop Violet meets Flick and Monty. I chose to have the waiter look disgusting and stained because he is a disgusting, rude person. While Flick, Monty, and Violet are sitting at the lunch counter, he is brimming with racism and hate towards Flick. I wanted his outer appearance to match his inner appearance. Earl was one of the interesting characters on the returning bus. He is also very strange. He carries with him a flea circus and grand stands while on the bus. I imagined him as an older character, a vestige of perhaps a traveling salesman from the 1930’s. To create this look I added a bowler, an older style of hat, a bow tie, and a tweedy patch pocket jacket. I felt all of this made him look older and disheveled. His final character was a bus driver, again, in a simple blue blazer and hat.
Character research

Fig. 3.35. Research collage – Leroy Evans, Waiter, Earl, Bus Driver inspiration.
Fig. 3.36. Rendering - Leroy Evans, Waiter, Earl, Bus Driver watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Old Lady 1 and Hotel Singer

Character analysis and concept

The first old lady is one of the passengers on the first departing bus. She spends a lot of time speaking with Violet on the bus. Violet says how beautiful she thinks the Old Lady is and imagines what she must have looked like when she was younger. Because Violet thinks this, I thought it was important to have the old lady look classy. So even though she was traveling on a bus, I thought she’d be wearing furs, gloves, and pearls. To create an aged look without adding makeup, I chose older style shoes, almost orthopedic looking, and glasses with a chain. A hat with a veil helped slightly obscure the face and hide the fact that there was no age makeup. The second character she played was a hotel singer. The musical style of her song was a sad jazz tune, accordingly I thought she would look elegant. For this look, I simply added a red flowing scarf, a flower to her hair, and gloves for a touch of elegance.

Character research

Fig.3.37. Research collage – Old Lady 1 and Hotel Singer inspiration.
Fig. 3.38. Rendering - Old Lady 1 and Hotel Singer watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Old Lady 2

*Character analysis and concept*

In contrast to the first old lady, the second old lady is a passenger on the returning bus. She needed to look rougher. For her, I chose a nubby brown knit sweater, sloppy shoes, sloppy stockings, and a ratty hat. Her second character was a basic passenger and character with the base costume used for all of the other looks.

*Character research*

Fig.3.39. Research collage – Old Lady 2 inspiration.
Fig. 3.40. Rendering - Old Lady 2 watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Mable

Character analysis and concept

Mable is another passenger on the returning bus. She is a beautiful lady Violet envies. Violet imagines she must look like Mable now that her scar is healed. For her look, I wanted a touch of Hollywood since most of the other women Violet idolizes were film stars. At the time of the design, this character had not been cast so I designed the look and decided to incorporate it into the actors track once the role was cast.

Character research

Fig.3.41. Research collage –Mable inspiration.
Fig. 3.42. Rendering - Mable watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Music Hall Singer

Character analysis and concept

The music hall singer appears when Violet, Flick and Monty go out on the town when they stop overnight. The musical style of the song is very rockabilly, a fusion style of rock and country very much in the style of Elvis. Because of this, I based the look on the queen of rockabilly, Wanda Jackson. However, due to a lack of resources in stock and build time, I needed to come up with an alternate look. I found in stock a black dress and added some rhinestone jewelry to give her a sparkling rock and roll look.

Character research

Fig. 3.43. Research collage – Music Hall Singer inspiration.
Fig. 3.44. Rendering - Mable watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Landlady and Lula

Character analysis and concept

The landlady is the proprietor of the boarding house Flick finds when they stop overnight. She is sassy, no frills, and very hardworking as the sole proprietor of the boarding house. To show her hardworking nature, I had her hair wrapped in a scarf and an apron with sensible shoes. This actor would also play the character of the Lula, the gospel soloist in the preacher’s choir. Although not illustrated, the final look for the choir was simple blue choir robes pulled over all of the base costumes. Blue robes were chosen to coordinate with the pastor and with description of his church as a “beautiful blue and white building.”

Character research

Fig. 3.45. Research collage – Land Lady and Lula inspiration.
Fig. 3.46. Rendering - Landlady and Lula watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Extra Chorus Women

Character analysis and concept

Several extra women were cast for vocal support in the show. None of them were featured characters; therefore, I wanted them to have a very general appearance. However, I wanted them to all have their own personality. Ken encouraged and helped all of the women develop their own unique characters with very specific background stories.

Character research

Fig.3.47. Research collage – Extra chorus women inspiration.
Fig.3.48. Rendering - Extra chorus women watercolor and mixed media rendering.
Fig. 3.49. Production Photo – Violet.
Fig. 3.50. Production Photo – Flick and Monty side.
Fig. 3.51. Production Photo – Flick and Monty front.
Fig. 3.52. Production Photo – Flick, Monty, Violet, and Waiter.
Fig. 3.53. Production Photo – Young Vi and Father.
Fig. 3.54. Production Photo – Preacher and choir.
Fig. 3.56. Production Photo – Mechanic.
Fig. 3.57. Production Photo – Hotel singer.
Fig. 3.58. Production Photo – Radio singers during the dream sequence.
Fig. 3.59. Production Photo – The departure group.
Fig. 3.60. Production Photo – departure group detail.
Fig. 3.60. Production Photo – departure group detail.
Fig. 3.61. Production Photo – return group.
Fig. 3.62. Production Photo – return group detail.
Fig. 3.63. Production Photo – departure group detail.
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The Learned Ladies

By Moliere

Directed by Leslie Brott
Set Design by Spencer Potter
Costume Design by Nancy Hills
Lighting Design by Bruce Duerden

Utah State University Department of Theatre Arts
Caine Lyric Theater
Fall 2013
Introduction

*The Learned Ladies* is a satirical comedy lampooning academic pretension and pedantry. Moliere shows how the excessive and inappropriate display of knowledge is ridiculous, thereby criticizing high French society of the time through his work. *The Learned Ladies* is also commentary on *préciosité*, a French term referring to the hopeful intellectual women of French society (“preciosity”). Although in contrast to modern views, Moliere is clearly criticizing 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century women’s pursuit of education and equality.

*The Learned Ladies* was an unexpected change in the UST 2013-2014 season; the season had already been announced and assignments made. However, it was necessary to have *Learned Ladies* substitute for another play. This meant reshuffling of assignments for directors and designers. By the time the dust settled, there was a little over two weeks for the director and design team to develop a concept and vision. Fortunately, the director, Leslie Brott, developed a concept very quickly in response to the changes. She decided she wanted to set the play in the 1920’s with an Art Deco style. The parallels between the 1920’s and late 1600’s supported this choice. Both were *salon* eras and hubs of philosophy and thinking. There were also parallels between changing gender roles and values. One of the most important factors was the 1920’s was a time before universal suffrage. In some ways, this made the sexist ending of the play a little more palatable because it was a viewpoint of the period.

In addition to the period and style of the 1920’s, Leslie liked the idea that these characters could be secretly 1920’s vogue while trying to appear academic and scholarly. The women of *The Learned Ladies* want to appear intellectual but struggle to commit to
their ideals. They would be secretly reading *McClure’s, Harper’s Bazaar,* and *Vogue* while it was tucked into a scientific journal. Most of the scientific books would be unopened and only present as decoration.

**Synopsis**

The home of Chrysale, a sensible bourgeois patriarch and loving father, is turned upside down when his overbearing and formidable wife, Philaminte, takes over and turns it into an academic salon. However, Philaminte’s and her followers’ pursuit of knowledge is superficial and pedantic. Chrysale craves simpler, traditional times, while Philaminte campaigns for an intellectual new world order. Caught in the midst is Henriette, Chrysale and Philaminte’s youngest daughter. Henriette loves Clitandre, a handsome young man who has Chrysale’s approval. However, Philaminte wishes for Henriette to marry Trissotin, the star of Philaminte’s pedantic salon. Thus, the story unfolds as Henriette struggles to marry her true love, Philaminte takes over the home, and Trissotin shows his true colors as an intellectual fraud and cad.
Character Breakdown

Following is a list of characters featured in the play:

- Philaminte – Mother of the home, early to late middle age, intimidating, formidable, austere.
- Belise – Aunt, Chrysale and Ariste’s sister. Middle age, mistakenly believes all men are in love with her.
- Armande – Philaminte and Chrysale’s eldest daughter. Early to mid-twenties. She is a jaded, jealous prude.
- Henriette – Philaminte and Chrysale’s youngest daughter. Early twenties. The play’s young lover, sensible. She sees through her mother and sisters foolishness.
- Martine – the sassy maid. 20-30 years old. She is Chrysale’s one ally in the house. She is far more reasonable then her bourgeois employers
- Chrysale – Father of the house. 40 years or older. He believes in women’s traditional roles and doesn’t see academia as important. He is completely brow beaten and terrified of his wife.
- Ariste – Chrysale and Belise’s brother. He is the plays raisonneur, or voice of reason. He encourages his brother to stand up to Philaminte and be the head of the house.
- Trissotin – Philaminte’s protégé. 20-30 years old. He’s a pretentious, poor, subpar plagiaristic poet.
- Clitandre – The plays other young lover. Early twenties engaged to Henriette.
- Vadius – fellow fraudulent scholar and friend of Trissotin.
- Lepine – servant in Philaminte’s house.
- Juliene - Vadius’ valet
- Notary (Learned).

**Venue**

The Caine Lyric Theatre is a small vaudeville theater built in 1914. The Lyric has a relatively small playing space, roughly 21 feet wide by 27 feet deep, and no fly system. An aluminum truss system replaced the condemned fly system. The truss has some limited rigging capabilities for scenery and lighting. The challenge of such a small stage was making sure there is ample playing space. Leslie, the director, was adamant there be enough room for the actors to move on stage, especially because of the relatively large cast size for the small stage. Despite the small stage size, for the production I felt it was important to provide a sense of grandeur in the set. That meant an efficient use of space and creating the illusion of a house and room that goes beyond the sightlines.

There is also a challenge in the Lyric imposed by ornate plasterwork surrounding the stage. In some ways, the plasterwork eventually becomes visual white noise, but it can also be distracting from the style of the set on stage. For some plays, the ornamentation really suits the design style, but for this design, the art deco look did not really go with the plasterwork. The question thus became how to either cover up the plasterwork or just minimize its impact. For my design I tried to minimize the impact by keeping the design within the proscenium frame.
**Design Concept & Objectives**

**Concept**

From the beginning of the project, one of the expectations from my design advisors was this design should challenge me to be more creative about designing a space that evoked a period and told a story, but wasn’t a museum piece of 1920’s interior design. Therefore, I focused my efforts on abstracting a style of the 20’s and creating a space that felt like a home, but was more sculptural in its approach. With the time period in mind and through research, I determined I wanted the specific style of the piece to be a mix of early cubist inspired Deco to create a frenetic energy and later Deco styles that utilized modern materials, geometric patterns, shapes and lines to create a space that reflected the tastes of Philaminte.

After my first several readings, the biggest message I took away from the script was this was beyond a doubt Philaminte’s home and thus her taste in décor would express her pedantic ideals. The essay in the preface of the script beautifully summed up the space as *Chez Philaminte* (Wilbur 156). With this in mind, I set about achieving my first design goal, creating *Chez Philaminte*.

Philaminte has managed to take total control of the home. Her poor husband Chrysale cowers in her presence. Her language is also very terse and hard. Philaminte is the exact personification of what Moliere was criticizing with this play. Stylistically I thought this would be reflected in overbearing shapes, sharp shapes and angles, and serious colors like gray, black, and white. This is where the root of Moliere’s comedy lies, the critiquing of the upper class and pointing out their ridiculousness. Thus, I felt it
was important the lines and shapes should be very exaggerated to highlight the exaggeration of the characters.

Art Deco suited the style choices I wanted very well. The major style characteristics of Art Deco are sharp, angular shapes and lines. Modern and industrial materials were also very popular and I felt could evoke the scientific aspect of Philaminte’s academic pursuits. I found these shapes and lines could be easily abstracted as well. When the size of these lines and shapes were exaggerated, they could make up components of a room such as a staircase, ceiling, and windows.

My other main objective was to create a space that had a pedantic or frenetic energy. Again, deco suited this objective well. I found zigzag patterns that were historically accurate for the period had a very frenetic feel. In my efforts to envision what pedantic energy would look like, I also realized cubism was very helpful. Cubism was one of the art influences of Art Deco and a good inspiration for exploring abstraction. Another art style I found helpful was Vorticism. I felt Vorticism also embodied a certain frenetic energy and I could easily see the shapes in Vorticism becoming a structure. In a more intellectual way, I could also see the use of large angles as a literal representation of obtuse and off kilter ideas. I also felt that the wandering nature of zigzag lines would also create a meandering feel that reflected how the pedants in the play tend to meander and go on tangents as they pontificate.

After developing my initial ideas, I sat down again with Leslie and reviewed them. It was at this point that the costume designer, Nancy Hills, also joined us. The major question we were all trying to answer at this point was color palettes for the set and costumes. My initial thought of grays and blacks ended up being a useful exploration.
Nancy saw the characters in bright candy colors. At first, my concern was about unity, but we concluded there was a bit of comedy in the fact the characters didn’t match their surroundings. The set reflected what they wanted to be, serious and academic, while the costumes reflected who they truly were as individuals, silly and cartoonish. Furthermore, the contrast of the set and costumes would really help visually pop the characters.

With all of the meetings and details very quickly hammered out, the final production and design objectives were solidified. My production objectives were:

- Tell the story of *The Learned Ladies* in a more modern time. The mid 1920’s were chosen because it was a time prior to universal suffrage and paralleled the events and attitudes of Moliere’s time.
- Draw attention towards the satire of academic pretension, and illustrate the absurdity of the pedantic characters.

My design objectives were:

- Show that Philaminte has taken over the home and made it hers.
- To emphasize the frenetic nature of the pedantic characters in the home.
- Emphasize the satire of academic pretension through the contrast of character and setting.
Research

Evocative

The first piece of evocative research I had was *Le Sacre Coeur* by George Braque. Finished in 1910, *Le Sacre Coeur* was one of the early Cubist works (fig. 4.1). Leslie gave it to me as an initial starting point. Personally, Leslie thought the painting was ugly and little ridiculous. It struck her as a painting Philaminte might like only because it was avant-garde. For me it was the springboard into exploring other Cubist works and geometrical art forms. Another movement related to the cubism and the period was Vorticism. This was a short-lived, cubist inspired, English abstract movement during the early part of the twentieth century. One of the works I found as part of my key images was a contemporary Vorticist painting. I was drawn to the frenetic energy that both the Vorticist and Cubist paintings have. The lines and shapes almost seem to vibrate. That energy reflected the energy of Philaminte and her fellow pedants (fig. 4.2 & 4.3). Other images I found were general images exploring frenetic lines, energy and shapes (fig. 4.4).

Fig. 4.1. Research Image - *Le Sacre Coeur*, Georges Braque. 1910.
Fig. 4.2. Research image – *Razzle Dazzle*, Kristian Goddard. 2012.

Fig. 4.3. Research image - *Razzle Dazzle* detail, Kristian Goddard. 2012.
Fig. 4.4. Research collage - Additional evocative research.
**Period Style**

I began my period style research with general Art Deco interiors and architecture. What I kept my eyes peeled for was anything that exemplified key Art Deco characteristics such as: geometric and stepped shapes, sharp edges, luxurious materials, and industrial materials (Bhaskaran 86). The piece of period research that influenced me most was the foyer of the Strand Palace Hotel. Built in the 1930’s, it was an excellent example of strong Art Deco lines and geometry (fig. 4.5 & 4.6). I was drawn to the sharp, sleek elegance of the lines and the contrast between the light and dark values. The images felt very strong and impressive, two things I felt Philaminte would want to emulate. I was also inspired by the luminosity of the foyer. Built in lights and mirrors added to the sleek, modern feel of the foyer. A modern look would have been important to Philaminte to illustrate her penchant for all things new and advanced. The modern look of Art Deco could also represent a more scientific aspect of Philaminte’s academic pursuits. Although *Learned Ladies* was written in a time of more literary academia, an influence of the Art Deco period was new technology and engineering. Deco’s use of modern and sleek materials such as chrome, plastic, and glass illustrates this. Finally, the most prominent element I took away from the image was the zigzag shape around the stairs. I thought zigzag lines in particular had a fun energy and a meandering quality.
Fig. 4.5. Research image - Strand Palace Hotel Foyer (Bernard)

Fig. 4.6. Research image - Strand Palace Hotel Foyer stair details (de Mare).
The second foundational image for period research was a corner of an Art Deco lounge (fig 4.7). This room shared similar qualities with the foyer, strong geometric shapes and lines, and communicated modern elegance. What I especially drawn to in the image was the ceiling. I feel ceiling pieces are often overlooked as a design element, but I’ve never really been able to envision how I could use one in any of my assigned sets until this one. The strong triangle shape of the ceiling could easily be part of a Cubist or Vorticist painting. I also felt the strong, overbearing shape would be representative of Philaminte. The ceiling piece could also create the illusion of a larger, grand space on a small stage.
Fig. 4.8. Research collage – Additional period style research.
Color palette

I found major inspiration for my color palette from one of my evocative research images. Grays were a popular color during the Art Deco period because of their steely appearance (fig. 4.9). It also worked to contrast the bright colored costumes Nancy had designed. After discussions with the lighting designer, Bruce Duerden, and experimentation with the lights, purples proved to be a very complimentary color to the set. Afterwards, I went back and incorporated purples into my color palettes (fig.4.10.)

Fig. 4.9. Color palette – grays.

Fig. 4.10. Color palette – purples.
Design Development

**Thumbnails**

In my initial explorations, my focus was on expressive shapes and composition. I didn’t want to overthink the design and make it stale. A challenge that had been proposed to me by my advisors was to loosen up in my design work and not micromanage details before the big pictures. I kept this strongly in mind throughout my thumbnail phase. After multiple explorations, and finding some additional research, I landed on an image that seemed to resonate the frenetic energy and composition I was looking for (fig. 4.11.)

![Fig. 4.11. Thumbnails – composition exploration.](image)
Sketches

From my thumbnails, I began refining my ideas with some sketches. After several variations, I developed a sketch to my liking (fig. 4.12) I very much stumbled onto my sketch. I was having difficulties translating my thumbnails into a sketch and developing my vision. I decided to let my hand loosen up and just draw. Once I’d loosened up, the sketch started to come together. The best way I can think to describe what happened was intuition. The drawing took on a life of its own and came together very quickly.

In my sketch, I found a composition that incorporated all the elements I liked in my research such as zigzag lines and geometric shapes. I also discovered placements for some semi-translucent windows. I wanted to use some sort of material that could be lit and suggest the light qualities I liked from the Strand Palace Hotel foyer. I also liked the idea that characters could be seen in silhouette listening in on the action in the room, a popular comedic device in Moliere’s works.

I liked that the room had more of an abstract quality or essence of a room. The overall appearance was more like a sculpture that became a room. I also felt the room was rooted enough in reality that it wouldn’t appear absurd. The room had an open feel and could provide a variety of staging areas. In addition to the open flow, I also explored what would make the room feel like part of a bigger house. A staircase leading to another floor of the house implied there was more to the room than could be seen. Also, the ceiling piece, although it came down low, gave a sense of height by drawing the eye upwards. The space behind the windows could presumably be a hall leading to other parts of the home as well.
Fig. 4.12. Sketch – Initial concept sketch.

Fig. 4.13. Rendering – Watercolor, ink, and marker rendering.
Ground Plan

Throughout the process, the design changed looks. This was reflected mostly in the floor plan. The original floor plan had been approved but it went through several developments. First, the bookcase and fireplace on the proscenium were struck and became two bookcase moved on stage as two masking units. Once rehearsals began, Leslie asked if anything could be done to open up the floor plan and add more playing space to the raised levels. A large bookcase on the back wall was added for business upstage, and final change was striking the column. The column was struck due to time, but it proved to be advantageous and open up the space even more. Fig. 4.14 illustrates the final ground plan.

Fig. 4.14. Ground plan – final ground plan.
Final Design

First Model

As mentioned, the design had several developments before opening. The original ground plan is seen in the first model. Most of the structural elements remained the same and the subsequent changes were primarily introduction and placement of furniture (fig. 4.15).

Fig. 4.15. Color Model – initial color model.
**Revised Model**

After all the changes and additions, I wanted to revise my model to reflect the changes made. This was also a chance to refine the model. Since completing the original model, my model building skills had improved greatly. With these improved skills, I was able to add greater detail into the model. Some of these details included better quality furniture, better set dressing in the shelves and more depth in the model pieces (fig. 4.16).

![Fig. 4.16. Color Model – final color model.](image)
In the final design, the production and design objectives were translated into three primary visual terms: line and shape, color, and decoration. Line and shape helped illustrate that Philaminte is a formidable and domineering woman. Sharp lines and strong geometric shapes reflected Philaminte’s presence in the home and her personal tastes. Zigzag and wandering lines created a room that emulated a pedantic and off-kilter energy. This energy reflected the other pedantic characters of play, specifically the members of Philaminte’s salon. The element of color communicated two main characteristics. First, Philaminte and her gang of pedants take themselves very seriously thus serious looking grays and blacks were chosen to illustrate this. The second thing color achieved was contrasting the characters and their surroundings. When the characters appear, their clothing is bright and colorful. They strive to create a serious and intellectual world, but they show their true colors as pseudo-intellectuals.

Finally, decoration fleshed out the finer details of the room and told the story of the characters’ interests. The zigzag and off-kilter shelves are filled with leaning books that emphasize the slanted lines and characters. The books are all academic tomes that show Philaminte’s attempt to look well read and knowledgeable. The shelves are also filled with scientific instruments of which no one knows how to operate nonetheless the function.
Fig. 4.18. Production photo – Final scene and full company.

Fig. 4.19. Production photo – bookcase details.
Fig. 4.20. Production photo – bookcase and desk details.
Works Cited


"preciosity". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. 


Appendix A

20th Century

Drafting Packet
20th Century
MORGAN THEATRE
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS

DIRECTOR: LESLIE BROTT
SET DESIGNER: SPENCER POTTER
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: MATT STOWE
LIGHTING DESIGNER: BRUCE DUERDEN

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1. LOUNGE FLOOR PLAN
2. EXTERIOR FLOOR PLAN
3. STATE ROOM FLOOR PLAN
4. CENTERLINE SECTION
5. DECKING
6. SOFFITS
7. STAIRS
8. UPSTAIRS WALL
9. LOWER LEVEL WALL
10. CLOSET DOOR
11. A&B 11 WALL
12. A&B 12 SLIDING DOOR
13. A&B 13 CENTER WALL
14. A 14 COMMUNICATION DOOR
15. A&B 15, C&D 15 SIDE WALL
16. A 16 STAGE RIGHT FALSE PROSCENIUM
17. A 17 STAGE LEFT FALSE PROSCENIUM
18. A&B 18 LOUNGE BUILT IN
19. A&B 19 TRAIN MASKING
NOTE: SOFFITS FOR S.L. STATE ROOM
R&R FOR S.R. STATEROOM
NOTE: PRACTILE LIGHTS
NOTE: PLEXI IN ALL WINDOWS. BUDGET PROVIDING

UTAH STATE THEATRE

20TH CENTURY

UNIT: UPSTAIRS WALL
DIRECTOR: LESLIE BROTT
DESIGNER: SPENCER POTTER
TECH. DIRECTOR: MATT STOWE
DRAFTER: SPENCER POTTER

METAL ROOFING SEE NOTE ON 9

A 8 DECKING

SCHEDULE

SCALE 3/8"=1'-0"
NOTE: METAL ROOFING WILL WORK FOR SIDING
SEE IMAGE BELOW
NOTE: DOOR IS DOUBLE HUNG
Appendix B

Legally Blonde: The Musical

Drafting Packet
LEGALLY BLONDE: THE MUSICAL
MUSIC &LYRICS: NELL BENJAMIN & LAURENCE O'KEEFE
BOOK: HEATHER HACH

UTAH STATE THEATRE DEPT.
NOVEMBER 1-10, 2012
MORGAN THEATER

DIRECTOR: KEN RISCH
SCENIC DESIGN: SPENCER POTTER
LIGHT DESIGN: BRUCE DUERDEN
TECHNICAL DIRECTION: MATT STOWE
Appendix C

*Legally Blonde: The Musical*

Individual Scene Ground Plans
NOTE: THE CURVED STAIRCASE WILL BE PULLED FROM STOCK AND EXACT DIMENSIONS ARE COMING. STOCK STAIRCASE IS WIDER.
Appendix D

The Learned Ladies

Drafting Packet
THE LEARNED LADIES
CAINE LYRIC THEATRE
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS

DIRECTOR: LESLIE BROTT
SET DESIGNER: SPENCER POTTER
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: MATT STOWE
LIGHT DESIGNER: BRUCE DUERDEN

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9. LIGHT FIXTURES
10. BOOK SHELVES AND POUF