



# designs of the times

Details count when making garments and sets to reflect a film's time period



Above, a costume sketch brought to life on the big screen in Focus Features' "Lust, Caution"; inset, the decade-appropriate neckwear and apparel in Paramount's "Zodiac"

By Todd Longwell

IT'S TEMPTING to put a decade into a tidy box, with a strict list of unique cultural and design attributes. In reality, no era is completely self-contained. Architecture, fashion and even hairstyles all show the accumulated remnants of previous decades.

"Sometimes when people make period films, they seem to be saying, 'Oh, it's 1974. Everybody must be wearing wide ties!'" observes costume designer Casey Storm. "That's kind of what makes it look like a costume piece."

Storm made sure to show a cross section of neckwear and apparel in Paramount's "Zodiac," which tells the true story of the pursuit of a Bay Area serial killer during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"From our first conversations, (director David Fincher) wanted to make sure that everything was accurate but nothing stood out," Storm says.

That aesthetic is taken to the extreme in Miramax's "No Country for Old Men." Although the film is set in 1980, most viewers would never know it. There are no ultra-modern gray sectional sofas, Patrick Nagel prints or any other telltale signs of the era.

"It was about keeping all the other periods out and just having 1980 be very understated," says Jess Gonchor, the film's production

designer. "I kept the cars of the period and the merchandise in some of the stores. That told the story that it was 1980."

Gonchor's preproduction research included flying west to scout various small Texas towns. He discovered that many of them had changed little since 1980 — or 1970, for that matter.

The locals Gonchor encountered concurred. "They would say, 'It was just like this. It hasn't changed a bit.' In this town of Las Vegas, New Mexico, where we ended up shooting half the movie, time stood still. Although we certainly had to be careful of Carl's Jr.s and McDonalds and things like that."

Sometimes discerning precisely what is period accurate can be a challenge, no matter how thorough one's research. Production and costume designer Lai Pan built from scratch a re-creation of a high-end World War II-era shopping district on Shanghai's Nanking Road for Focus Features' "Lust, Caution." He had no problem finding a wealth of photos, documentaries and writings to use as references, but the group of historians hired by director Ang Lee to consult on the film had conflicting views.

According to Pan, some would insist that Nanking Road was quite bleak in the fall of 1942, while others would maintain it was unusually prosperous. Eventually, Pan got a definitive answer when he uncovered a docu-



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mentary that showed a thriving Nanking Road, bustling with thousands of people.

The Nanking Road set took four months to construct at Shanghai Film Studios and ended up stretching 853 feet by 525 feet, with 182 stores. While the individual details were recreated with pinpoint historical accuracy, the big picture was somewhat telescoped.

"On Nanking Road, the theater, boutique, café and jewelry store did exist, but their real locations were not the same as the ones described in the short story (on which the film is based)," Pan says. "We built the streets and houses on Nanking Road working from a map of Shanghai from that era, but those key locations were arranged according to the short story's specifications."

Production designer and Oscar nominee Sarah Greenwood wanted an authentic historical location to portray the Tallis family's British country home in Focus Features' "Atonement." At first, she had her heart set on the Tyntesfield Estate near Bristol, England. But the property was owned by the National Trust, and the filmmakers would have had to cope with severe use restrictions and regular visits from tourists. So Greenwood turned to her second choice, Stokesay Court in Shropshire. When she first visited the property with director Joe Wright, she

was not impressed.

"It was really grim," recalls Greenwood. "There were no furnishings, no wallpapers. It was very gloomy and depressing. But, in retrospect, it was great, because it gave us a blank palette."

"Zodiac" production designer Donald Graham Burt transformed the old post office in the Terminal Annex Building in downtown Los Angeles into the San Francisco Chronicle newsroom. Everything was authentic and fully operational, from the vintage lighting fixtures, typewriters and phones to the drinking fountains and elevators.

The makers of "Zodiac" were fortunate that many of the people portrayed in the film were still alive to assist the filmmakers in their quest for accurate detail. For instance, former Chronicle cartoonist Robert Gray-Smith (portrayed by Jake Gyllenhaal in the film), who wrote the books on which the film is based, provided Storm with reams of photographs.

"I had a lot of photos of Gray-Smith in bad plaid shirts from that period, so we felt like it was important for that to be a part of it," Storm says.

Recreating early 1960s Baltimore in Toronto for New Line's "Hairspray" was no less daunting. Production designer David Gropman's crew converted over 60 modern-day storefronts, changed all the signage to circa 1962 and filled the streets with period vehicles.

The over-the-top hairstyles in the film might seem too extreme to be authentic, but hair and wig designer Judi Cooper-Sealy says they adhere closely to the historical record.

"Believe it or not, about every hairdo on the screen I saw somewhere in a magazine or on one of the dance shows," she says. "The only thing I exaggerated was Queen Latifah's beehive."

Like Gropman and Cooper-Sealy, "Hairspray" costume designer Rita Ryack called upon a wide variety of research materials to craft her looks for the film, from old high school yearbooks and magazines to archival footage of various dance shows of the era. But her No. 1 resource was her own memory.

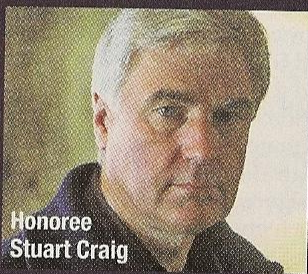
"I lived it," Ryack says.



For more on the period pieces and Wild Wild West garb costume and production designers created this past year, log onto [thr.com](http://thr.com)

## setting the stage

The Art Directors Guild Awards salutes its own as the guild itself turns 70



Honoree  
Stuart Craig

THE 12TH ANNUAL Art Directors Guild Excellence in Production Design Awards, set to take place Saturday at the Beverly Hilton, will, of course, honor 2007's standouts in film, television and commercial production design. But it will also be an auspicious evening for the guild itself, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

"We did a nod to (the anniversary) in the design of our set ... which has art deco influences of the late '30s," awards co-producer John Sabato says. John Janavs, who created the set, is also a nominee in the Awards Show, Variety, Music or Non-fiction Program category for his work on Fox's "Hell's Kitchen."

This year, the designation "nonfiction" replaces "documentary" to make the awards "as inclusive as we can," Sabato says.

The single-camera TV series race will see NBC's big-budget hit "Heroes" go up against AMC's breakout "Mad Men" and ABC's "Lost," among others, while multicamera TV series nominees include CBS' "How I Met Your Mother" and two-year category victor "Mad TV" (Fox), for which Sabato is nominated. This year's TV movie or miniseries competition has only three nominees: TNT's "The Company," HBO's "Pu-239" and USA Network's "The Starter Wife."



Honoree  
Ray Harryhausen

The feature film category consists of period, fantasy and contemporary sections, with Paramount Vantage's "There Will Be Blood," DreamWorks/Paramount's "Sweeney Todd" and Focus Features' "Atonement," among others, in the period race, and Warner Bros.' "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," Disney/Pixar's "Ratatouille" and Disney's "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" among the fantasy hopefuls. Contemporary nominees include Miramax's "No Country for Old Men," Warner Bros.' "Michael Clayton" and Paramount Classics/DreamWorks' "The Kite Runner."

Among the commercial contenders are Lexus' "Hydrant," Budweiser's "Space Station" and HBO's "Voyeur: Four Floors, Eight Stories" promo.

The ADG will present Stuart Craig with the lifetime achievement award for his work on such films as 1978's "Superman" and the "Harry Potter" series. Ray Bradbury will present his good friend Ray Harryhausen, whose credits include 1981's "Clash of the Titans," with the Outstanding Contributions to Cinematic Imagery Award.

But beyond the prizes doled out under the emceeding auspices of Harry Shearer, the ADG Awards are about "designers and art directors voting for their peers," Sabato says.

— Shannon L. Bowen