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Who Does What: The Costume Designer

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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JENNY BEAVAN OBE, RDI, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 189 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E6.1 Lesley Manville in *Mrs Harris Goes to Paris* (2022). Costume and couture working seamlessly together on one film. Costume designer: Jenny Beavan OBE, RDI. Alamy/Focus Features/Moviestore Collection

How hands-on are you?

I don't draw and don't believe in it for costume. Drawing is two-dimensional and has no body language to bring it to life. I do mood boards to get a sense of where I am going, and then I work on a stand, or a hapless passer-by, to see how the ideas work in 3D. I think all designers should sew, learn basic cutting, art finishing, fitting and all the crafts – the more the better.

I can certainly re-back a waistcoat, if necessary, sort out a clogged-up sewing machine, dye and paint – maybe not to the highest standard but enough to get us out of trouble – and, more importantly, I know what I am asking my crew to do.

Find Jenny on Instagram.

RACHEL TALALAY, Film Director

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 194 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E6.2 A comedy costume drama classic! Rachel Talalay directs Matt Lucas as Toad in *The Wind in the Willows* (BBC/CBC, 2006). Costume designer: Vin Burnham. Costume maker: Day Murch and the MediaPro costume workshops Buftea. Bonnet made by Jane Smith. © Box TV (Production) Ltd/Wind Productions (Muse Inc)/SC Media Pro Pictures (SA)

How best can costume designers assist your process?

I like to look at a good variety of visual references, discuss direction with the designer, let them create, and then I want to see fittings photos. After fittings, I ask the designer how the cast member feels about their choices. It's helpful to have a trusting relationship with the designer so they can communicate what a cast member revealed. Did they love everything? Or hate everything? Are they self-conscious about their body? The costume designer often learns the 'true nature' of an actor before they exhibit that (or act out) on set.

If an actor expresses a strong opinion about the clothing choices, and I choose something else, learning

this information from the designer allows us to speak to them about the reasons for other choices. The cast must be appropriately dressed for the character but also to be comfortable and in synch with their look. It's all about collaboration.

How do you unite a film crew?

I relish group meetings. It's critical that the departments work together. Costumes do not exist in a vacuum. For example, how many times have I seen a production designer do a lot of black (or white, or coloured) furniture, and at the same time the costume designer has chosen matching colours or hues. The result is that

◀ they all blend into one and do a disservice to each other. In addition, the DoP has to light and film these costumes, so designers need to consider how the costumes/fabrics will react to lighting conditions and camera sensors. Designers benefit from learning about new cameras and lighting equipment, and then engage in camera tests to see how the costumes will look on

film under the lighting conditions. It's a symbiotic relationship that works when everyone collaborates to achieve the desired results, and this creates beauty and harmony.

Find Rachel on Instagram.

NICK GOLDSMITH, Film Producer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 196 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E6.3 A TV monitor is an essential piece of on-set kit enabling cast and crew to see each shot exactly as the camera sees it. But Nick has his own views about only looking through the eyes of the camera and not using your own! © Sean Collymore

◀ ***Are monitors on set a blessing or a new source of problems?***

Since we now all shoot digitally on high-res digital cameras, the monitors are incredibly high-res. You can see absolutely everything. Everyone crowds around them and finds faults because everything's so crystal clear. For me, this takes away a little bit of the magic. What we do in filmmaking is create magic. We're not creating perfection; we're creating an illusion, telling a story. Sometimes the obsession with detail may not always be necessary.

When we used to shoot on film, the monitors were rubbish. Everyone on set had to use their eyes. I wonder whether there's something different in the way people look at a high-definition monitor – you see a lot more than if you were just watching. I say to crews, 'Don't rely on the monitor. Use your eyes, and watch the action as it's happening. You might spot something completely different, something more important.' If I had my choice, I'd ban monitors on-set!

How should costume designers handle their budgets?

A good producer will always have something up their sleeve. But it's there for good reason – they really don't want to use it. No department should think it's fine to go over budget because the producer has extra money; that just shows bad planning and communication. Budgets should be set realistically at the beginning. A costume designer who goes over budget is not a good look. My dream is one who has given me a budget for what they need, but they have a contingency in there that *I* don't know about. It's important that the costume department realize that producers have the

same problems they have but magnified by ten departments. Any contingency a producer has is for the whole film.

Film crew must be adaptable to whatever's going on, and able to come up with solutions on the spot – for example, multiple versions of the same outfit in case a lead costume is damaged. That's part of the costume budget, planning and schedule, then if something happens, you're okay.

The producer has to make tough decisions. They are handling the budget for the whole film. If a director says, 'I must have this', sometimes it's not possible, and the producer must stand up to them. When you're pushed into a corner, you have to think of a creative solution to make it work with what you've got. If you engage your brain to think about solving a problem, the solution is normally better.

Which type of costume designers do you like to work with?

Someone who loves what they're doing – and lets the producer hang out in the costume shop! I hear people complain their job is a nightmare more often than that their job is amazing. What we do is really hard work, and you have to be diligent and take it seriously, but it's also a real privilege, and if you can't enjoy it in the moment then I think you're missing something. We do amazing things, in amazing places, with incredibly talented people. We make these bonkers things that other people really like. Don't wait to look back at it. Say 'Oh, this is fun!'

Find Nick on Instagram.

MASSIMO CANTINI PARRINI, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 215 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E6.4 Massimo Cantini Parrini on the set of *Cyrano* (Working Title Films, 2021) with actor Marc Benton (Montfleury) resplendent in one of Massimo's inspired costumes. © Photo courtesy of Massimo Cantini Parrini.

How critical is your knowledge of period pattern cutting and construction to your process?

Very very important! As it is for an architect and other construction jobs. Every job must be done to perfection. I studied historical and contemporary cutting techniques for five years to be able to communicate with cutters and to understand what can and can't be done. I also took seminars about historical hair and make-up for about three years in a row so that I could collaborate with and understand the other departments. In Italy, different to other countries, the costume designer is responsible for hair and make-up too to make sure that the characters are fully coherent from head to toe.

How important is 'patina' to your process, the dyeing, printing, painting and distressing?

Very, very important too! It's the living soul of my work. It's what gives life and truth to costumes. It adds

realism and really helps the actor to get into character. It's a very hard job. I tried it when I was still an assistant, and I've experienced the effort it takes to give life to the garments. I am very thankful I had the opportunity to try it so that now I'm more aware of what I want and able to explain how to achieve it. It is a great job. My breakdown team are tireless and have amazing skills!

Do you have a regular team? What do you do yourself, and what do you delegate?

I have an amazing team I've been working with for many years. Sadly, though I do not delegate much, I need to have everything under my control. I am a bit of a maniac, and I do know it can at times be difficult for my team, but it's stronger than me! If I am not on set, my assistants always send me photos and videos of what's happening so that I can check everything is

◀ alright. When it comes to a supervisor, sadly, I can only have one on international productions. It's not a very common role in the Italian film industry yet.

What was your primary source of research for the Pinocchio costumes?

For every film, either historical or contemporary, I spend a lot of time researching. Most of my inspiration comes from museums – luckily there is no lack of them in Italy! I have an enormous collection of books that keeps growing, and since I was a teenager, I've been collecting period and vintage garments. I now have a collection of about 4,500 pieces dating from 1640 until 1990. Nothing is quite the same as having the opportunity to look at authentic clothes. They are my guide and inspiration. It's just a shame

that it's now hard to find the right body shapes for them to be worn.

What is your advice for people aspiring to follow in your footsteps?

Study, study, study, passion, passion, passion, visual culture, visual culture, visual culture. It's not a job everyone can do. You can't just decide to be a costume designer without study, passion and being immersed in visual culture.

Anything else you'd like to add?

I'd like to add that it's becoming harder to do this job because the preparation time is being cut more and more.

Find Massimo on Instagram.



Figure E6.5 Massimo amid his extensive period costume collection which provides him with inexhaustible inspiration. Photographer: Pamela Gori.

SANDY POWELL OBE, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 219 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E6.6 Sandy Powell OBE with her 'signature' suit: Sandy wore this two-piece toile suit to events during the 2020 film awards season, collecting autographs from star names as she went. The suit was later auctioned as part of fundraising efforts to purchase Derek Jarman's cottage at Dungeness, Kent. The suit was donated to the V&A Museum. © Stephen Chung/Alamy Live News

Which designers have inspired you most?

The costume designers I became aware of as a teenager and in my early twenties were Piero Tosi and Sue Blane. Both have a theatre background, and I think their larger-than-life approach attracted me to their work. They are still to this day in my top ten. I saw *Death in Venice* when I was fourteen or so and fell in love with everything about it. I saw it about seven times, bunking off school in the afternoons to go.

The Rocky Horror Show designed by Sue Blane was like nothing I'd seen before, just genius, and then a few years later *The Draftsman's Contract* had costumes that have inspired me my entire career. I had seen the film a couple of times thinking that it looked gorgeous, sumptuous and expensive, then was amazed when I saw the costumes exhibited that they were made entirely from calico, muslin and cotton drill. I thought this was fantastic and used this years later as inspiration for *The Favourite*.

◀ I always look at contemporary fashion whatever period I am designing as there will always be something interesting that can spark an idea, even if it's a detail or a colour combination. Fashion designers have always looked at historical costume as well as film for inspiration, which goes to show that we are all feeding off each other most of the time.

The designers I have drawn from most, and go back to time and time again, are Balenciaga, Dior, Vionnet, John Galliano, Alexander McQueen and all the Japanese designers. I also love to see what new young designers are coming up with either in the degree shows or early on in their careers where there is a refreshing lack of inhibition that only happens with the young!

Is there anything you'd still like to do?

I'm lucky to have a job that I still love and am learning from. There are many periods, subjects and genres I have not done and am looking forward to doing if they come along!

Your advice to young costume designers?

I would advise anyone thinking of going into a costume design career to be totally prepared for a long haul of hard work and unsociable hours! But more importantly to be prepared to start at the very bottom, even if it means doing something seemingly unrelated to costume but within the department where you can always keep your eyes and ears open and ALWAYS ask questions.

My first ever job was sweeping the floor of the men's cutting room at the National Theatre on the Southbank for £20 a week during the summer holidays at school. I offered to sew a hem, and before long I was being given a whole costume to put together! And finally, always trust your instincts and have confidence in your own ideas. Even if you're not feeling confident, it helps to pretend!

Find Sandy on Instagram.

Types of Film Producers

There may be more than one producer on bigger productions, with different titles and roles that vary with each project. The following definitions are not finite.

executive producer

Any number of ‘execs’ can be working behind the scenes. Their roles can include a range of responsibilities from development and film finance to creative input, which happens before pre-production starts. Execs can also have approval on the director, principal cast, the costume designer and other heads of department (HoDs).

associate producer

A similar but less responsible role to the execs, some with ‘token’ titles, for contributing in various ways. They rarely work with the costume department.

producer

This hands-on role starts in advance of pre-production, covering a plethora of purposes and functions, including managing the overall production budget and schedule and hiring the HoDs. The producer is the costume supervisor’s main point of contact, working closely throughout the process. The producer may delegate the day-to-day running of production to a line producer or unit production manager.

line producer

The most senior member of the production team. The costume supervisor is answerable to them on matters of budget, crew and schedule – the logistical, practical and financial aspects of production. Their role could be delegated in part or in full to the UPM or production manager to handle the more routine daily tasks.

unit production manager (UPM)/ production manager (PM)

They have similar but less senior administrative responsibilities to the line producer, coordinating with all HoDs to keep production on track.