

THE JOY OF SETS

Handbook of Set Design
For Community Theatre



Jane Coryell and her 1/2" scale stage model for *84 Charing Cross Road*
The Oakville Players at Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts, 1998

Dr. Jane Coryell

THE JOY OF SETS

A Handbook of Set Design For Community Theatre Groups

by

Dr. Jane Coryell

Preface and Acknowledgements

This handbook is based largely on my experiences with community theatre groups: The Oakville Players, BurlOak Theatre Group, WEST (West End Studio Theatre), Guelph Little Theatre, RCMPPI (Royal City Musical Players Inc.), Waterdown Village Theatre. The book also includes lessons I learned as I was designing sets for schools: E.C.Drury H.S., T.A. Blakelock H.S., and Fern Hill private schools in Oakville and Burlington.

The book has a four-fold dedication.

The first is to Clare Henderson of The Oakville Players. In 1979, knowing my interest in theatre and art, he angled for me to design *1837 ~ The Farmers' Revolt*. "Oh, I couldn't do that," sez I. "Oh, yes you can," sez he. So I did. And I've been hooked on set design ever since ~ 100 productions between 1979 and 2012, sometimes doing 6 or 8 productions in one season.

The second is to Reginald Bronskill. The Oakville Players received a grant to hire Reginald to be general consultant for their 1985 production of *Dracula* ~ specifically in set design, construction, and lighting. He taught me everything I needed to know about thinking through a script, conceptualizing the set, making diagrams for layout, construction, lighting, and all the jobs inherent in the role of set designer. The rest I learned through experience.

The third is to community theatre groups and Fern Hill Schools which have invited me to design sets. Each production has been a pleasurable learning experience.

The fourth is to the technical staff at Oakville's Centre for the Performing Arts. Since 1979, they have indirectly coached me in set design considerations; such as, planning a set that enhances the lighting designer's creation, accommodating given theatre spaces and facilities, meeting safety standards and theatre liabilities. Every production at the OCPA teaches me new lessons.

I am grateful for opportunities to develop design thinking and skills. I am especially glad to have enjoyed over three decades of a wonderful balance between solo and collaborative creativity.

~ WARNING ~

Set Designing can be injurious to your sleep. Invariably, you will wake at 3am with solutions to old problems OR with fresh insights into new challenges. Keep paper and pen at your bedside to scribble "note to self" in the dark so that you don't disturb your sleeping companion. You also risk being called *The Queen or King of Detail*. Take it as a compliment. The more detail you put into the stage model, the more likely the REAL set will look as you'd imagined ~ even better, since a whole team of people will have had a clear, detailed picture in mind.

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Responsibilities of the Set Designer ~ Don't be scared off!

Set design is a HUGE responsibility. In co-ordination first with the Director, then with Lighting and Costume Designers, and Construction, Scene Painting and Set Dressing Crews, **the set designer can strongly influence the audience's understanding of the entire play – characters, action, setting, moods, and themes. The set gives vision to the text and subtext.** The Set Designer plays a major role in the visual evocation of time and place of the play, as well as its atmosphere and ideas. The set helps express characters in and interpretations of the script. Designing begins with discussions with the director so that visions of the play mesh.

It is important for the set designer to have an artistic and theatric frame of seeing and thinking; such as, an appreciation for

- negative spaces in balance with the positive shapes. For instance, spaces between objects as well as the shape of the objects themselves
- detail visible from the front row as well as from the back row of the theatre
- what colour does psychologically AND under stage lights. For instance, warm colours come forward to the eye; cool colours recede. If a lot of green on stage is lit with red gels, the stage pieces can look rather brown / grey
- appropriate symmetry and asymmetry
- effective contrasts without being intrusive for the audience

Ideal Checklist of Responsibilities

- In consultation with the director, establish a visual interpretation of the play. Decide the style of set ~ fully realistic, impressionistic, abstract-symbolic.
- Do thumbnail sketches to finalize design decisions with the director.
- Do a rendering (full drawing or painting) or fully detailed sketches, plus a scale model, floor plan, construction diagrams for builders, elevations for lighting designer
- Advise on stage props and set decoration (set dressing) for consistency with design intentions. Make a list for set dressers to use. Provide pictures of furniture, curtains, wall treatments (paint colours, wallpaper patterns), especially for a period piece.
- Explain the model and visual concepts to the cast and crew at an early read-through with the cast and at the first meeting with the production team.
- Be ready to attend occasional rehearsals in order to check how the set is being used. As rehearsals progress and ideas develop, be ready to adapt the set to ensure that it serves the conceptualization of the play, the blocking, and the action.
- Provide colour schemes and fabric swatches for scene painting, costuming, lighting.
- Consult with set construction team to resolve problems that may arise. Be ready to adopt workable solutions the crew may create. Encourage creative problem-solving.
- Consult with head scene painter or painting coordinator (unless you're performing all three of those roles, as often happens in community theatre).
- Consult with lighting designer to coordinate best visual effects to capture the play's intentions and the action.
- If your rehearsal space is not the performance space, give the theatre staff the floor plan, elevations, and hanging necessities before the move-in.
- Be at the move-in from the beginning to ensure positioning of set and hanging necessities. Ideally, the stage manager takes charge of the move-in. But you may be needed for on-the-spot decisions and changes.

- During the move-in and technical rehearsals, ensure that touch-ups are completed. Critically examine the set from every vantage point in the audience ~ front and back rows, extreme sides, centre. Check for any changes that may be required from the audience's point of view. For instance, if there are gaps between flats, they can be taped with black gaffers tape on the back of the adjoining flats. Unpainted bits ~ like newly attached door hinges ~ can be touched up. Check that the audience cannot see past door and window openings or behind / above where you don't want them to see. The problems can be resolved sometimes with moving legs or flats or furniture. If light is bouncing off the tops of flats, paint or tape the top edges black.
- Attend technical and dress rehearsals to ensure that everything to do with the set has been taken care of. If there are any jobs left, be prepared to do them yourself if time is short or if assistants aren't available.

Ideal Time-Line for Set Designer ~ at least 6-9 months

ADVICE ~ See lots of other productions

See as many productions a year as you can ~ professional or not. "Borrow" set ideas. Make thumbnail sketches on your program, or take a small sketchbook. You never know when someone else's idea will be useful for a production you design. If you steal outright, acknowledge the previous designer in your program. Your version will never be exactly the same simply because of performance spaces, budgets, and production skills. The original designer will likely be honoured by your acknowledged "borrowing". Keep in mind that taking ideas from one source smacks of plagiarism. Borrowing from many sources is research. As Picasso said, "Bad artists copy. Good artists steal."

ADVICE about directors

If the director says, "I know exactly what I want," and then proceeds to give you all the details, you might consider saying, "Well then, you've got your design. Have fun." That situation means you're simply an illustrator. Your artistic and theatrical skills will still be needed for sketches, a model, diagrams, set dressing and scene painting. But you won't be especially challenged as a set designer. But if the director does bring a fairly detailed sketch, be glad of having saved considerable thinking and working time. Collaboration for refinements can proceed apace.

If the director says, "I'm not sure what I want," and you make some preliminary sketches based on your insights / vision of the piece, be prepared to revise, revise, revise. Each sketch may give the indecisive director fresh insights and ideas. While this process may be inspiring for each of you, it will slow you down considerably.

If the director is inexperienced or unfamiliar with your performance space, you may need to do some advising about optimal stage usage ~ use of space, set and lighting.

Ideal directors give you a clear, overall idea of their vision of the play and their expectations of the set. Then, you are free to develop that vision in conjunction with yours. And always consult, consult, consult. If, as often happens in small groups, you are set designer AND builder AND painter AND dresser, then consultation is easy. Meeting times are reduced. But the workload is huge.

Script Analysis from the Set Designer's Point of View

**IT IS CRITICAL TO DO THESE STEPS SEPARATELY.
RESIST THE TEMPTATION COMBINE THEM.
Otherwise, useful information can be missed.**

Ideally, ignore the stage directions. Usually, they are from the first production of the play and may have no relation to your particular playing space and budget.

1. Do a **FIRST** reading of the script **non-stop**. Form an impression of what is happening on stage. Immediately after reading, make a thumbnail sketch, or a "stick set", of your impression of what the set might look like. This picture-note is for **YOU**, and probably (preferably?) no one else will ever see it. It's just a reminder of your first impressions.

2. **Re-read** the script, listing **ALL** the words **IN THE DIALOGUE** that indicate **WHEN** the action occurs. Beside each quotation, jot down any conclusions or interpretations you make about the historical era, time of year, time of day.

3. **Re-read** the script **A THIRD TIME**, listing all the words in the dialogue that give clues about **WHERE** the action occurs. Beside each quotation, jot down your ideas of country/city, interior/exterior, type of building and surroundings, spaces, furnishings, stage props.

4. **Re-read** the script a **FOURTH TIME**, making notes/quotes from dialogue which reveals or suggests **WHO** is involved: each character's age, personality, background, relationships with other characters.

5. Jot down your impression of the overall feeling/intent of the play, its mood, its **ATMOSPHERE**. Consider how the set could convey that atmosphere. What colours, textures, patterns would suggest the tone of the piece?

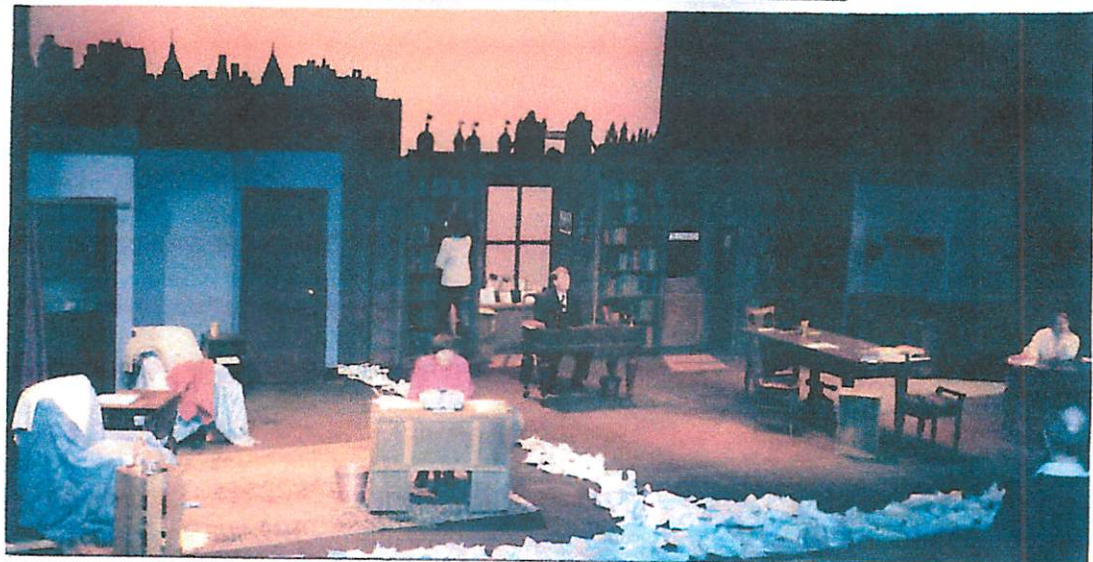
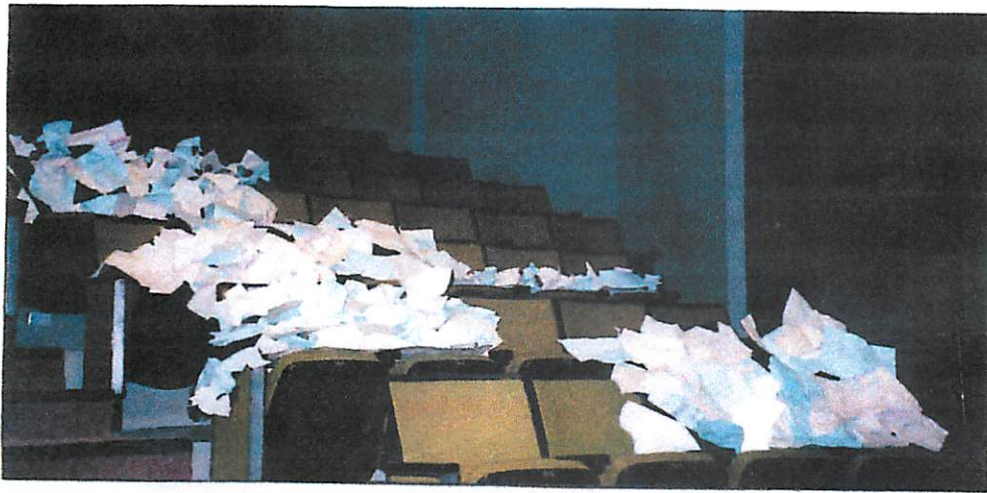
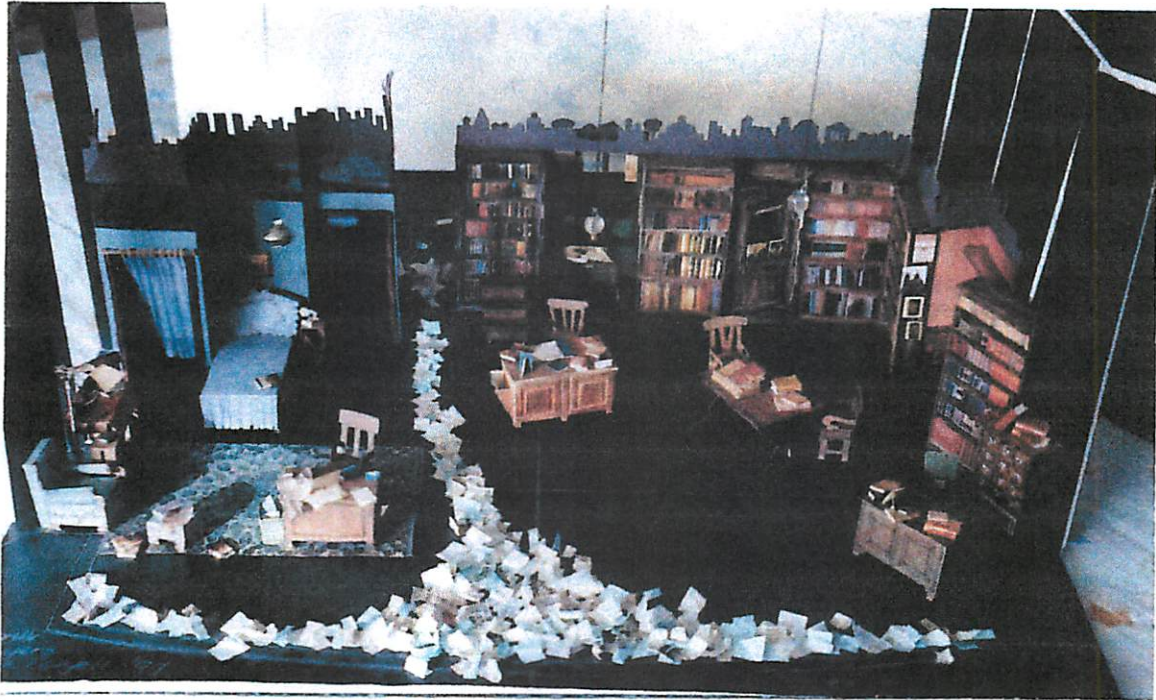
6. Make a more detailed sketch (even if it's a "stick sketch") of a set that would capture your impressions/conclusions. This sketch **may** still be only for you. Depending on detail and clarity, it could be useful in preliminary discussions with the director. Is a full box set needed, especially for hidden entrances? Will a partial set and varied levels suggest spaces and times? See pages 10-15 for examples of full box sets and partial sets.

7. **Return to the text yet again** and your notes to find a possible **VISUAL METAPHOR** for the play. An over-simplistic example would be red for a play filled with blood, fire, destruction, death. Free-association is useful. See pages 5 - 9 for examples of Visual Metaphors. Don't belabour this step. Sometimes a script simply doesn't lend itself to a visual metaphor. If other people see visual metaphors you hadn't intended, welcome that engagement. It means your design really captured their imagination.

NB: Very early, establish what kind of set best suits the script. Box set? Changeable pieces; such as "wagons" or moved furniture? Different times and places seen simultaneously in various levels and areas? If the theatre has a main curtain, is it used? When? Why? Does the audience see set changes? Who does the changes? Cast? Crew? Is the crew costumed to suit the play? Or do they wear standard black? Are blackouts used? Why? See pages 5-29 for varieties of styles of sets.

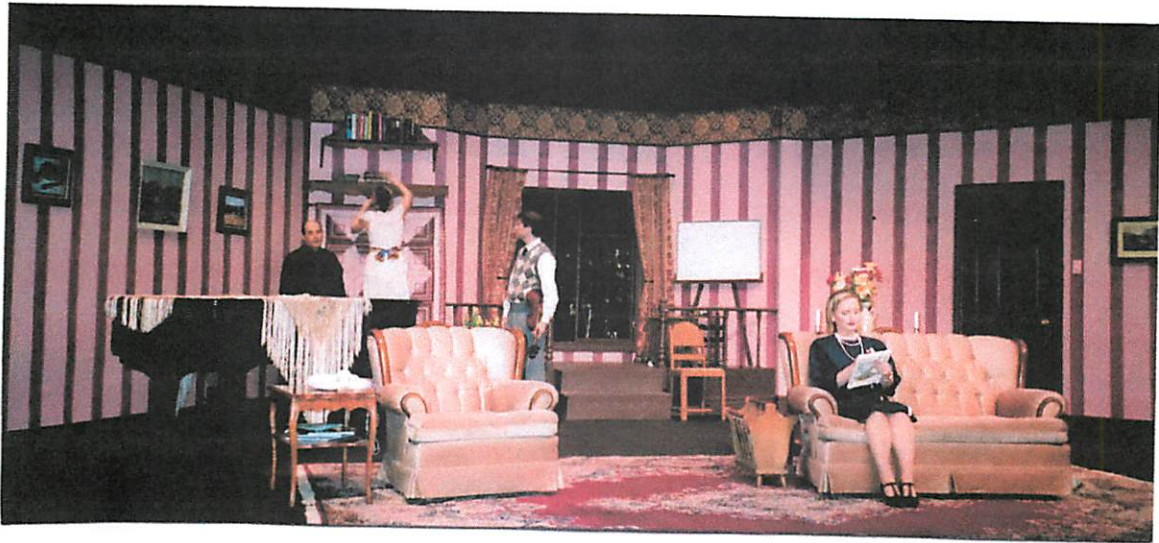
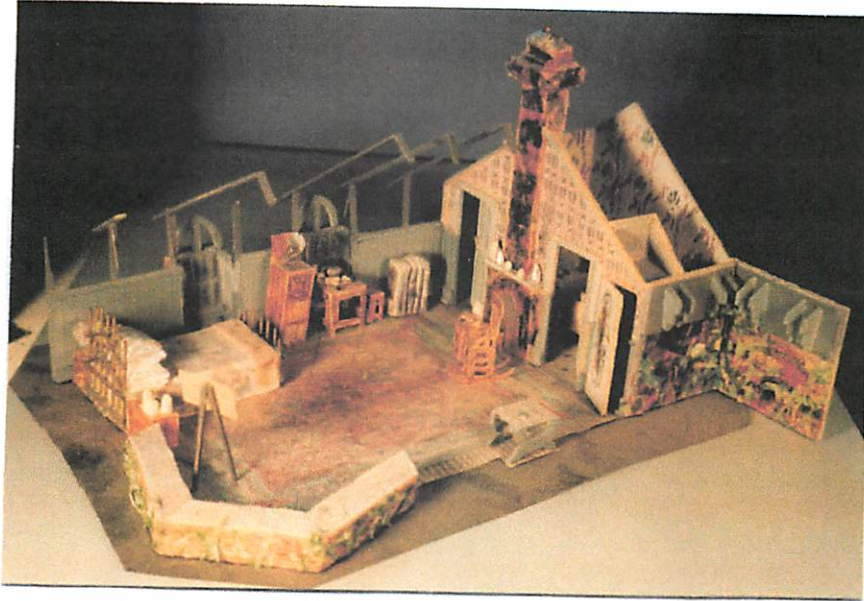
Examples of Visual Metaphor

The "Sea of Letters" for *84 Charing Cross Road* (The Oakville Players 1998)
on the maquette, in preparation, and on stage



Visual Metaphor

Model of *Veronica's Room* (Burloak Theatre Group 1986) attic rafters as cage & threat



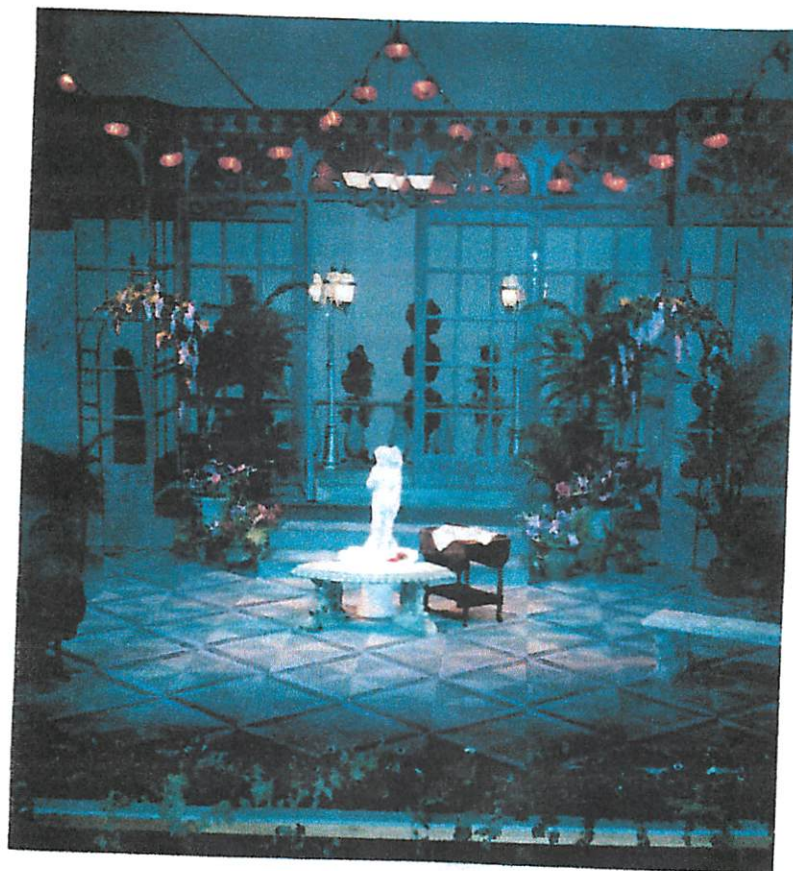
Curious Savage striped wall-paper as metaphor of cage (the Oakville Players 2009)



The colour red as visual metaphor in *The Bad Seed* (Burloak Theatre Group 2003)

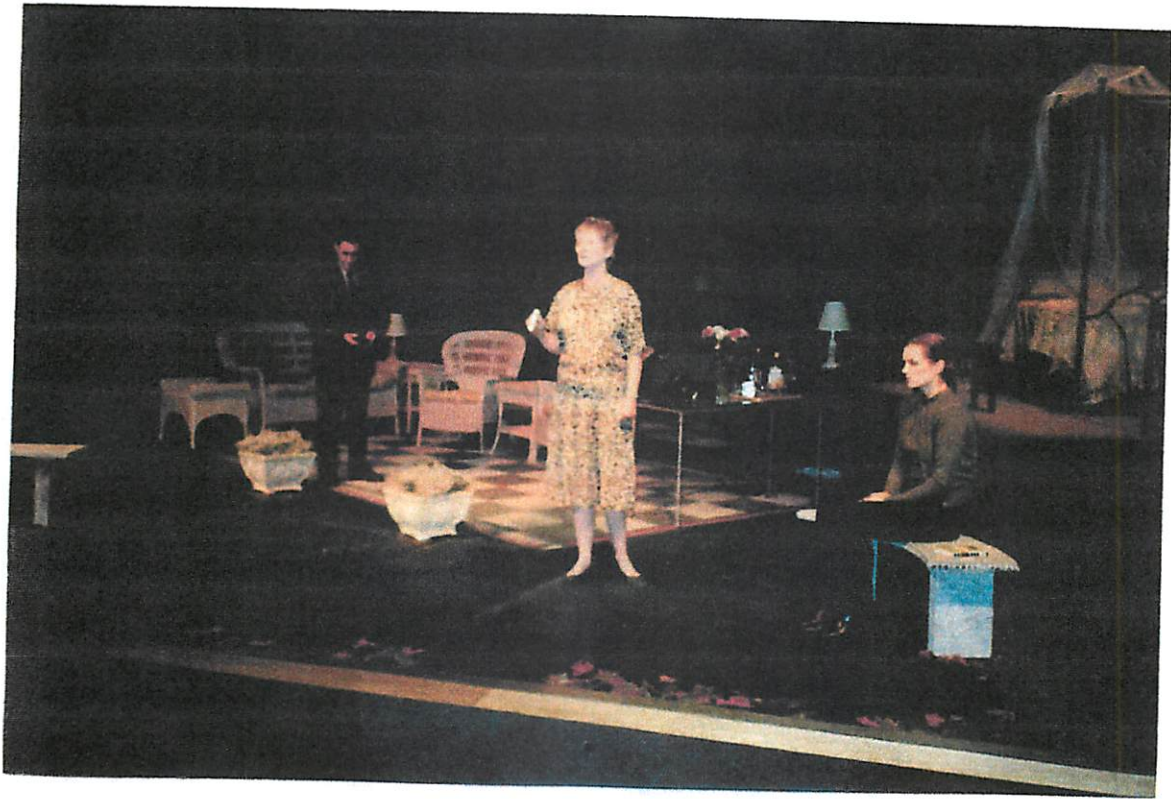
Visual Metaphor

On the maquette and stage, triangles on the floor of the conservatory for *Ring Round The Moon* (The Oakville Players 2001) ~ a play filled with love triangles

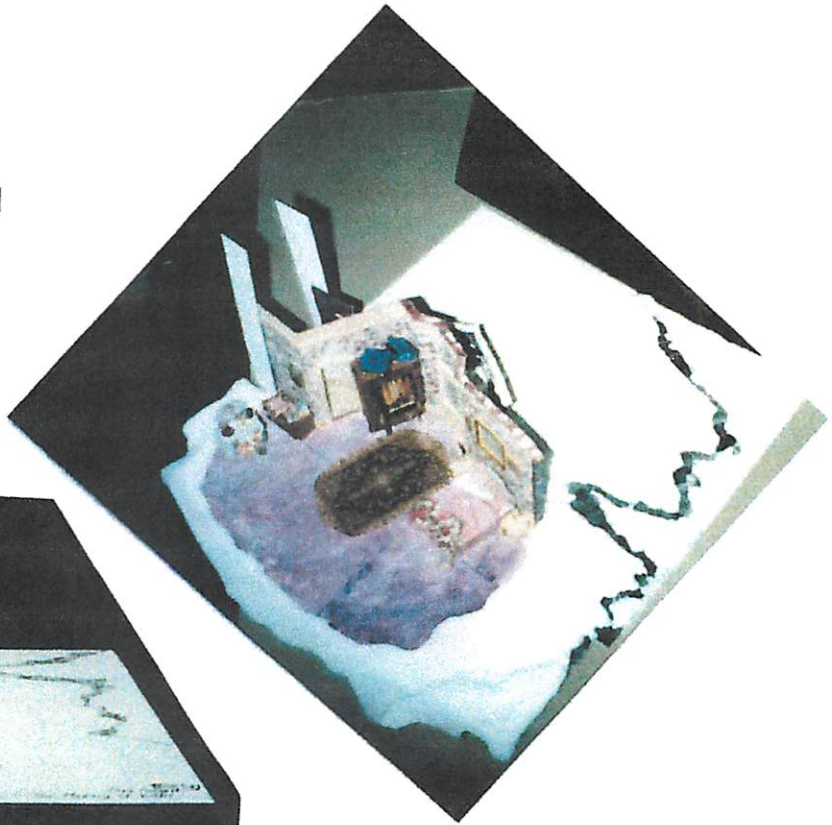


Visual Metaphor

The Stillborn Lover (The Oakville Players 1999) in shades of grey, with a chessboard floorcloth as the sitting room rug, and red maple leaves scattered across the apron in a play which involved spying and murder.

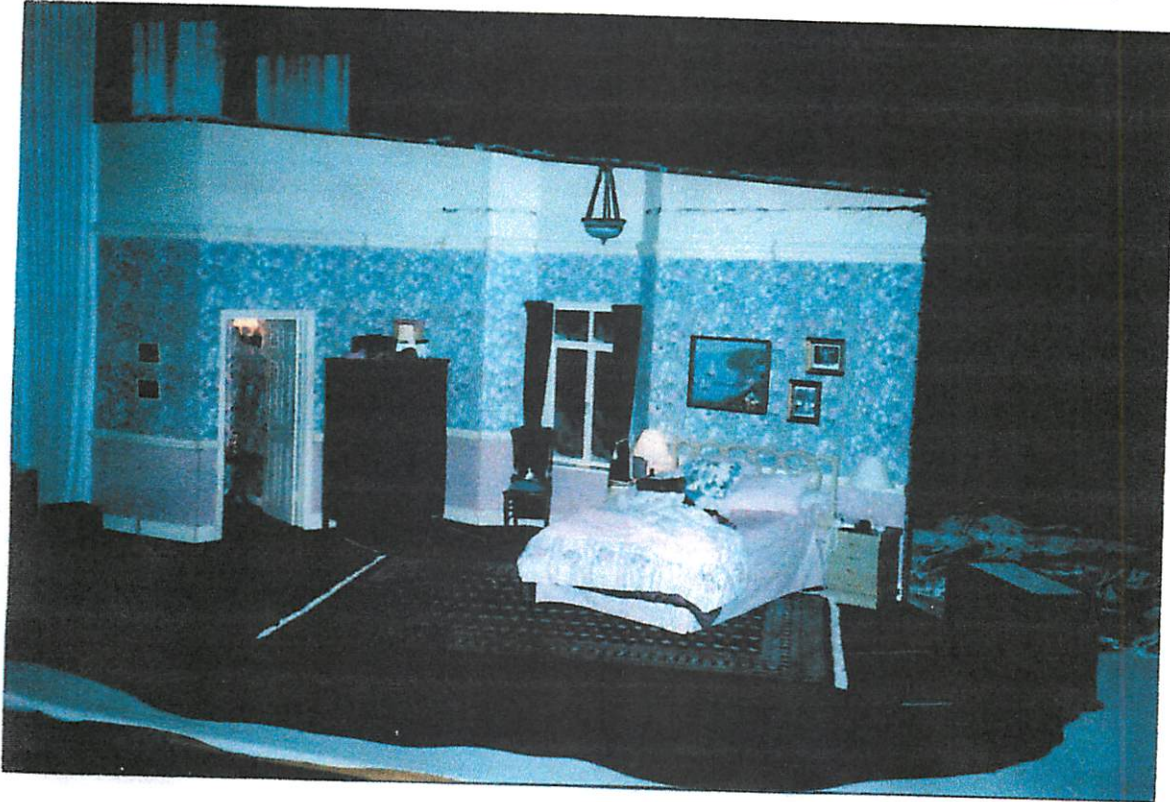


Cracks in the wall above the bed and in the outside snow (fabric) as image of the cracks in family memories and relationships in *The Memory of Water* (BurlOak Theatre Group 2002)



Visual Metaphor

The Memory of Water on stage. (See maquette p. 8) The dialogue referred to a cracked wall. References were made to the house being on the edge of a cliff and about to topple over. We used white fabric to cover the black legs. White fabric was mounded up to create piles of snow. Segments were separated, thus revealing the black stage floor which created a jagged black crack in the snow and ice "below" the house.

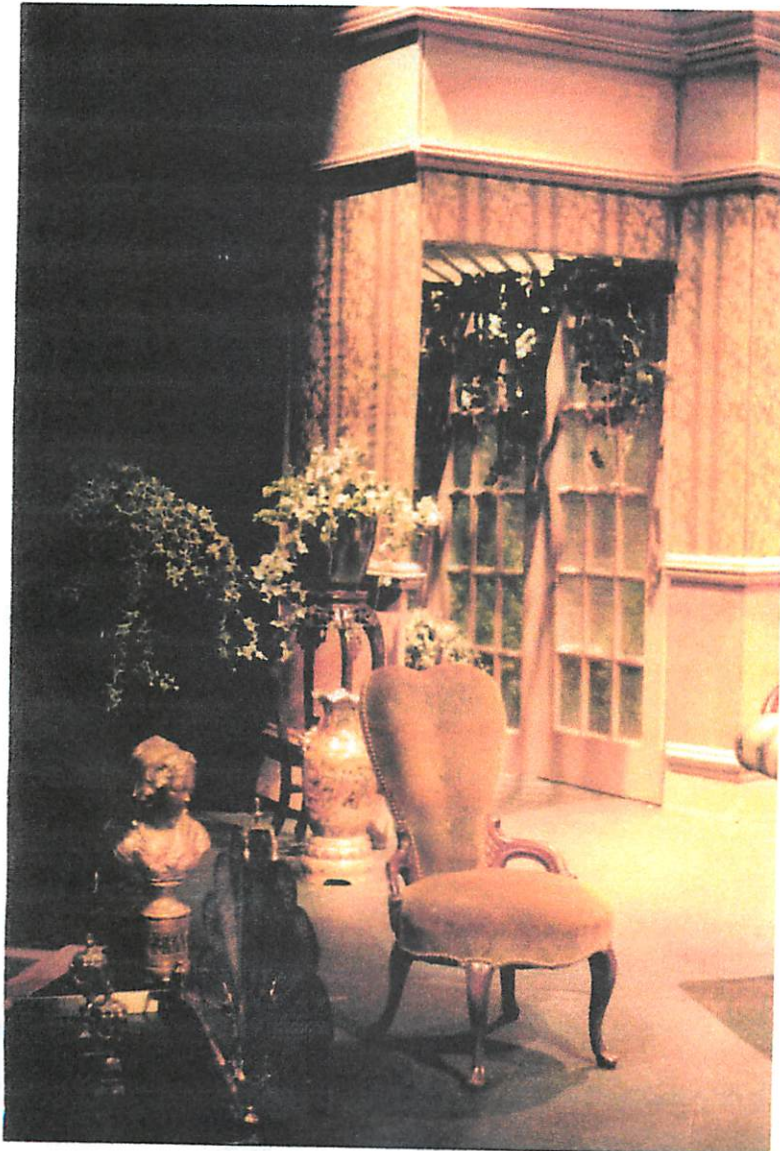


Examples of Full Box Set

A full Box Set may be needed for hidden entrances. It may also be the natural way to present the script. It may be the director's vision. One challenge of a box set lies in making the walls believable and interesting. Another lies in sightlines. The audience should not see through a doorway to the backstage area. If the audience space is sloped, the back row should not see over the tops of flats to walls behind the main room. Also, bracing A-frames and backs of flats must not be visible.

Below and next page show the box set for *When We Are Married* (BurlOak Theatre Group 2002). A fireplace was established with tiles, andirons, fireplace tools, and fire screen at extreme downstage right, so that it didn't interfere with sightlines in the first three rows. The script didn't call for a lit fireplace. Locating it on the apron enabled the logical positioning of furniture facing the fireplace, and the audience. Flats at right-angles helped stability. The room was set at an angle so that audience in the back rows would not see over the tops of flats to the raw wood of receding flats.

Fabric was stapled to flats as wallpaper. Molding was free cardboard, available from a local appliance store. (It is used to protect corners of appliances in transit and is simply discarded by the store.) Visual interest was enhanced by the number of "returns"; that is, the number of times walls recede or advance.



Box Set for *When We Are Married*



Box Set for *The Winslow Boy* (The Oakville Players 2007)

Fireplace is suggested down centre at edge of apron.
The garden / patio is visible through the French doors, at stage right.



Box Set for *The Winslow Boy*



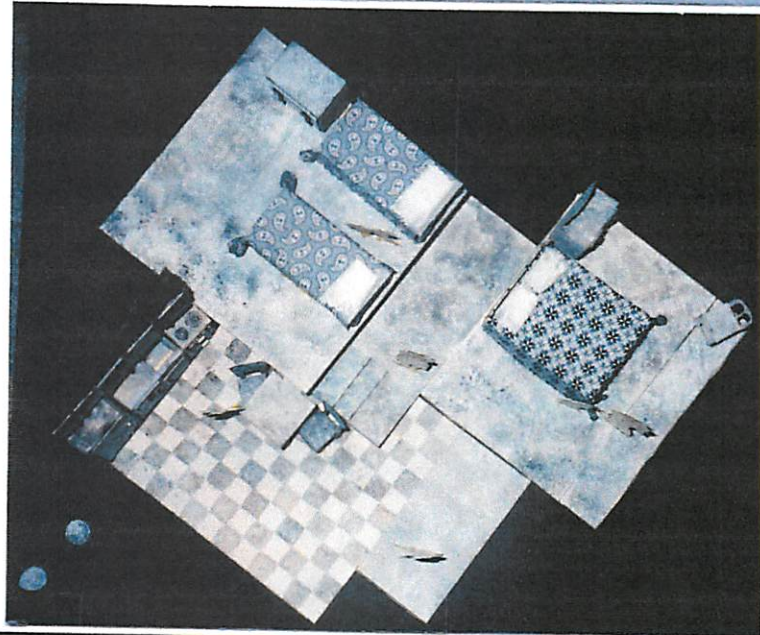
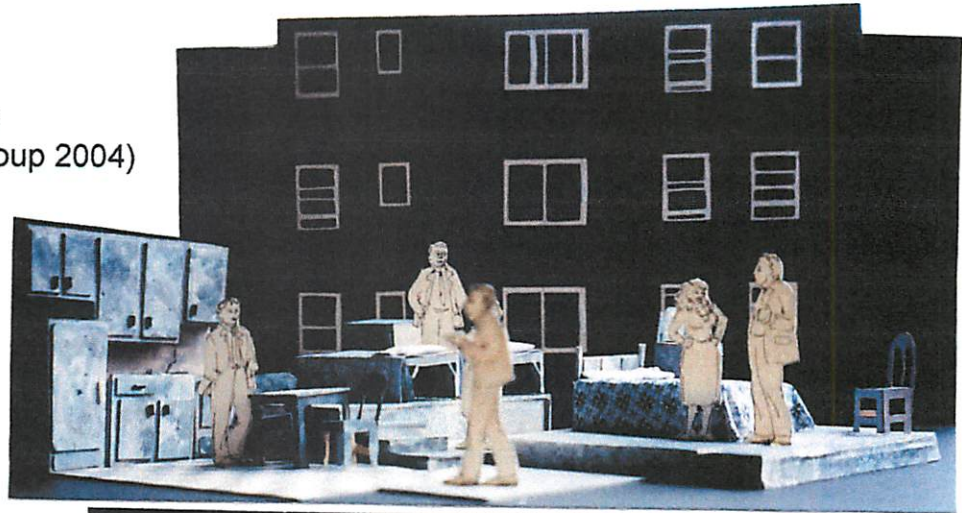
Examples of Partial Sets ~ giving the impression of walls & multiple spaces

Death of a Salesman
(BurlOak Theatre Group 2004)

Set suggested various times and locations by several levels and playing spaces, without flats or blackouts.

Window frames flown on one line upstage suggested neighbours and closed-in spaces.

Shades of grey evoked the characters' lives, as shown here on model and stage.



Partial Sets ~ giving the impression of walls & multiple spaces

Dark Victory (The Oakville Players 2006) used no flats for quick, easy scene changes. Placement of windows, doors, fireplace, and paintings automatically established "walls". Trees behind the French doors established exterior patio / garden.

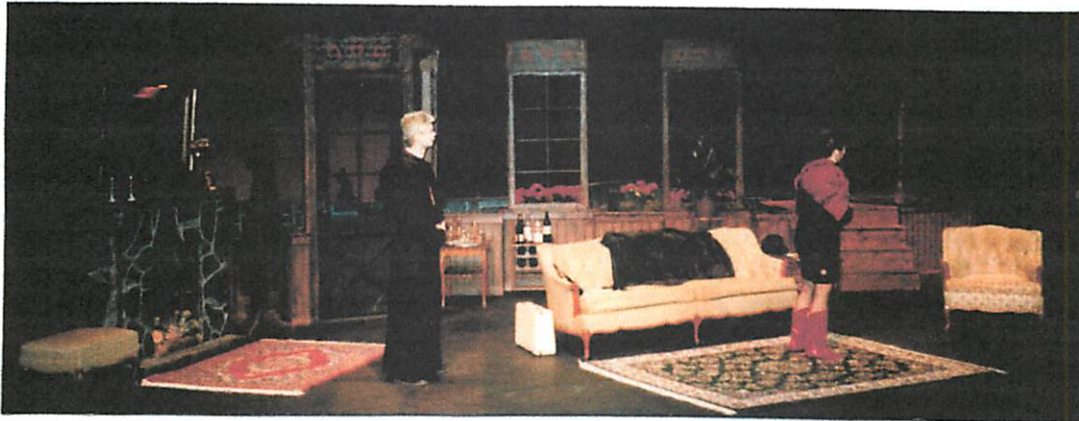


Except for the hall-stair unit and window, stage left, *Bad Seed* used no flats inside the apartment. "Walls" were established by furniture positions. Seamless changes in time and place along with themes of secrecy and disclosure were made visual.



PARTIAL SET ~ suggesting a space without using full walls

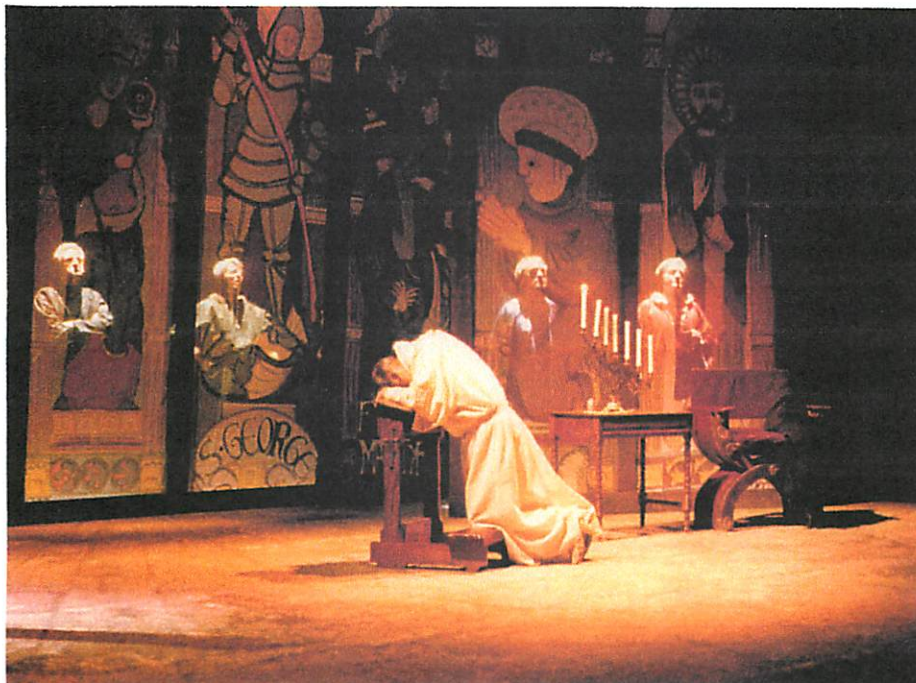
Trap for a Lonely Man (The Oakville Players, 2000), is set in a chalet in the Swiss alps. We showed exterior and interior simultaneously because we needed to see some characters outside while others were seen inside. The set used wood wainscoting as "walls" between windows, door, fireplace. Above the door was a triangle to suggest a chalet's peaked look. The picture frame above the fireplace was empty to coordinate with the open spaces. Outside, there was a stone wall to suggest patio. Behind it was a mountain view, created by two scrap parachutes dipped in "mountain coloured" paint. Once dry, they were draped over several theatre chairs and manipulated into jagged "rocks". Chutes were free thanks to an armed forces connection in the theatre group. Since a romance was involved, the flowers in the exterior window boxes and the heart designs above the door and windows were red.



DESIGNING WITH SCRIM

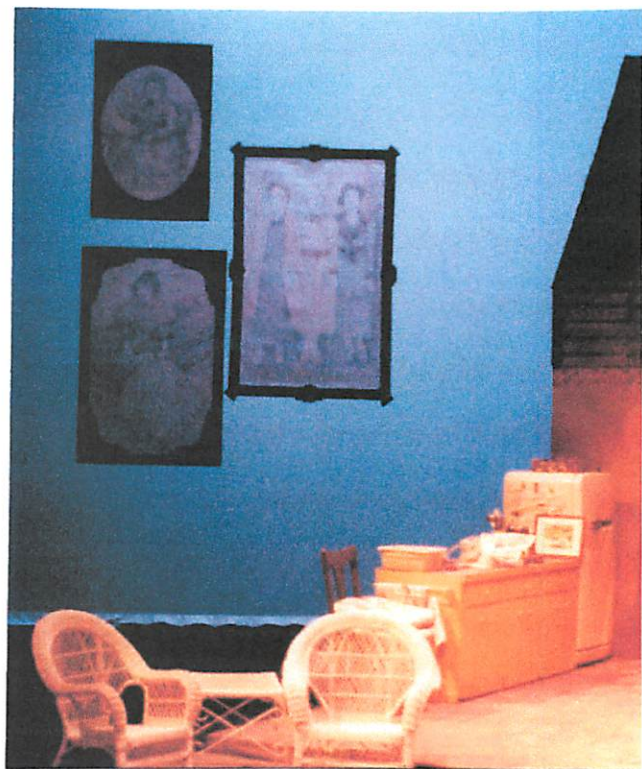
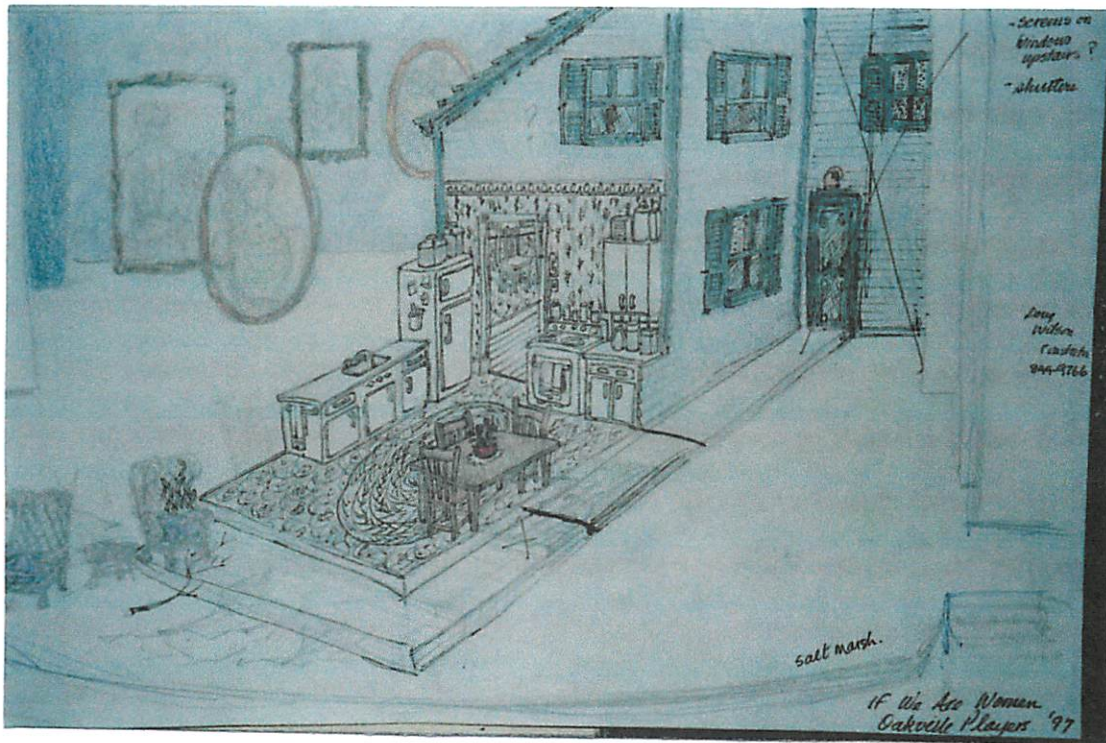
Scrim is an open-weave fabric, like a heavy cheesecloth. When there is no light behind, it is opaque. It becomes transparent when lighting is behind it. Despite the back-lighting, the images drawn and painted on the scrim are still visible. The images can be painted with thinned latex or with dyes. (p. 18) The image can be treated free-hand, or traced from a design on paper underneath the scrim fabric.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* (Everyman Theatre 1984) scrim “stained-glass windows” hid the murderers who were dramatically revealed on cue with top-lighting.



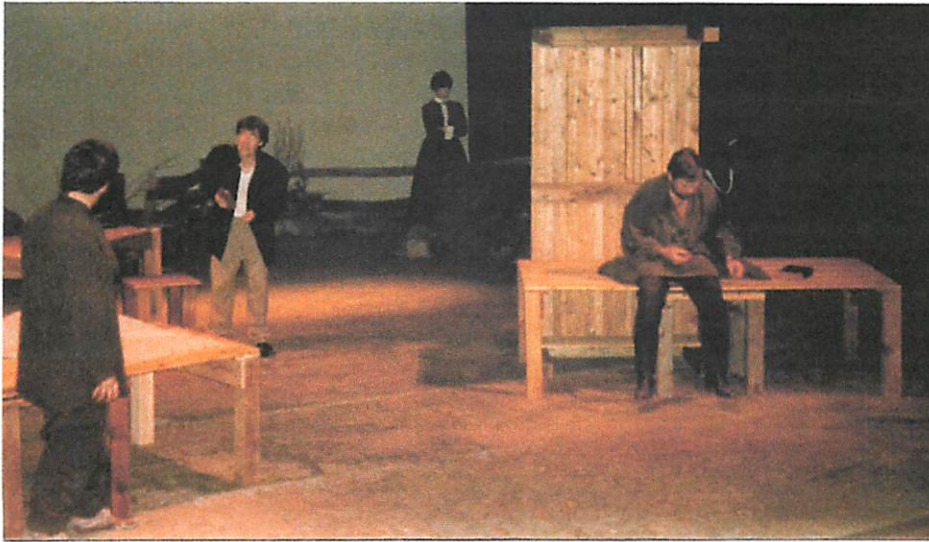
Designing with Scrim

If We Are Women (The Oakville Players 1997) focuses on three generations of women and "the telling of truths". Below are an early sketch, one scrim portrait, three portraits on stage. The portraits served as metaphor and helped fill the stage right area, left open with the raking (slanting) of the areas for the beach, deck, kitchen, and house walls. (Our program did thank CanStage for their designer's idea of a house exterior / interior).



DESIGNING WITH INTERCHANGEABLE & MOVEABLE SET PIECES

Morrison, (The Oakville Players 1984), set in pioneer rural Ontario, used many quick changes of location and time. To accommodate changes without blackouts, large tables also served as walls and benches, amidst snake fences, scrub, rocks and logs.

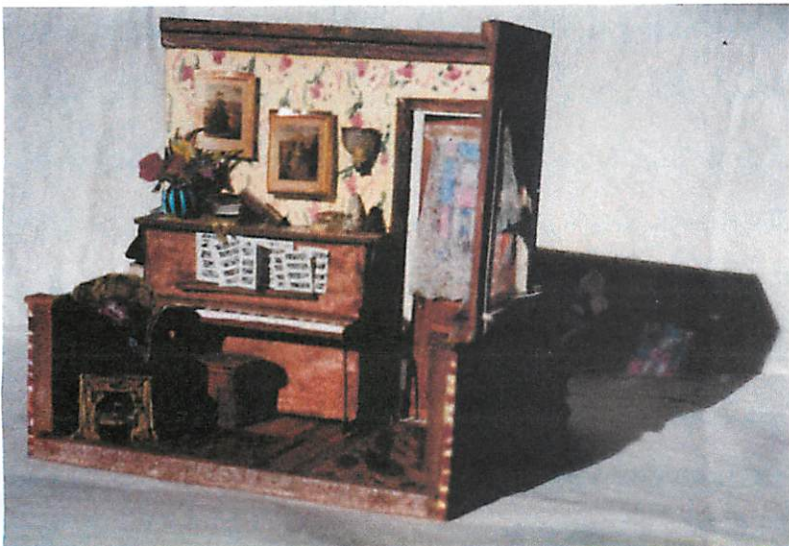


DESIGNING WITH "WAGONS" ~ ROLLING & ROTATING SET PIECES

A "wagon" is a self-contained pre-set unit mounted on a platform or riser, which is rolled into place with locking casters.

The Music Man (Fern Hill School Oakville 2004) needed quick changes of small interior and large exterior spaces. The maquette below shows the house for the piano teacher. It was rolled on stage and rotated as required.

- ~ front of the house with porch, flower boxes, stained glass front working door, brick wall
- ~ side view of house with window looking into the music room
- ~ interior of house, with upright piano, piano stool, and small armchair



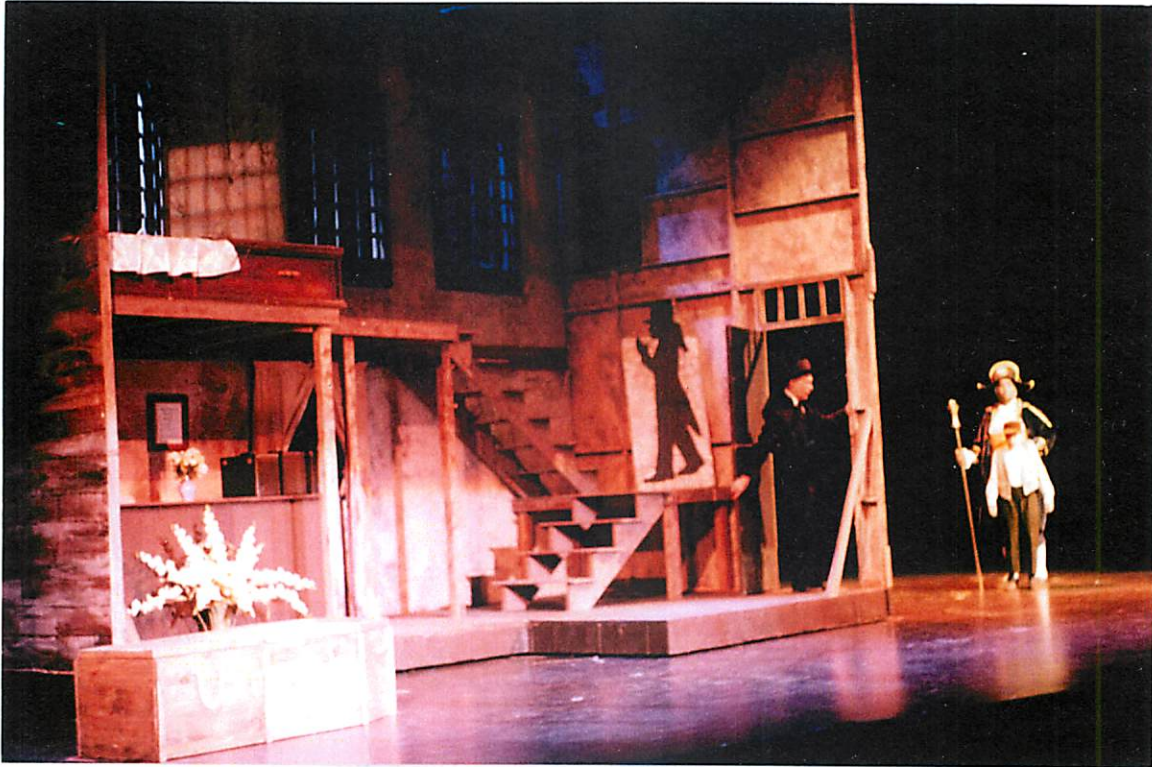
DESIGNING "WAGONS" ~ ROTATING AND ROLLING SCENES

Hobson's Choice (The Oakville Players 2001) rotated a unit 16' x 8' with a working door between the shoemaker's shop and his parlour. The "wagon" of four 4' x 8' x 6" (high) risers, assembled as one unit, rolled on locking casters. At scene changes, short steel poles were inserted into diagonally opposing corners of the unit to start, steer, and stop the rotation. The 10' high flats were at right angles for stability.



***Oliver* ~ a 2-storey Wagon**

One of the wagons in the 1998 Royal City Musical Players Inc. production of *Oliver* was a massive, 2-storey unit of the coffin maker's home on one side, with Fagin's workhouse on the other. The ends were used as London street scenes. Rows of chimney pots added visual interest along the tops of the flats. To the set builders' credit, the crew smoothly started, guided and stopped the wagon's rotation.



SET AS A WALL OF WINDOWS ~ *AMADEUS*

For *Amadeus* (West End Studio Theatre 2002), three huge drawing windows without glass or plastic were supported by pillars painted as marble with Corinthian capitals (cardboard cut and curled into shapes). Two walls painted with dancing figures flanked the row of windows and gave more support. Above was flown a "musical stave", the width of the stage. For a Rococo period touch, it was decorated with gold ribbon and putti. Dolls heads were dipped in paint and hot-glued to the "stave". Stiff paper was cut and painted for the putti's wings and hot-glued at the heads.



ONE SET WITH MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

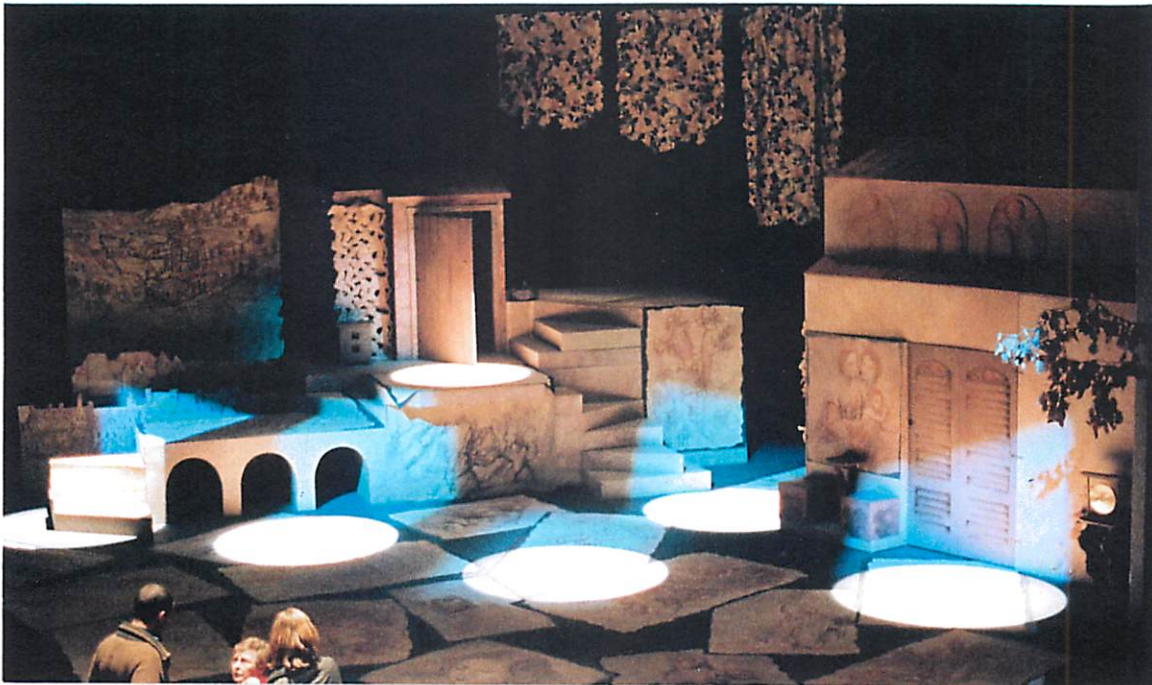
Vinci (The Oakville Players, 2005) tells the story of Leonardo da Vinci's father and grandfather wrestling the boy away from his mother, who lives in a small hillside house near the paternal family villa. At one point, the villa garden doors opened to reveal a bedroom. Scenes included the town bridge and church. Time frames also varied.

The visual metaphor was of a Leonardo sketchbook torn apart and strewn around the stage. Large versions of his drawings were projected onto big pieces of vinyl which had been painted to resemble manuscript paper. We used oil pastels to trace projections. "Borders" were painted flat black to give the impression of a torn edge. Then, black gaffers tape secured the vinyl to the stage floor. Stage scenery was painted to suggest Leonardo drawings. To signify a church scene, we flew *faux* stained glass windows made with matte shower curtain liner coloured with felt-tip makers and stapled to arched frames. In hillside scenes, we flew large pieces of fabric filled with sepia-coloured leaves, with edges and holes cut to reduce the flat look. That same fabric signified vines creeping up a wall of the hillside house. At first, the "vine" was low, just behind the wooden stool beside the door. We cut a hole in the flat above the vine, which was attached to a string that blended with the wall. On cue, behind the flat, crew slowly pulled the string to gently raise the vine. To my immense gratification, a woman seated in front of me on opening night whispered to her companion, "Oh! Look! Time is passing!" She'd got the point perfectly!



VINCI

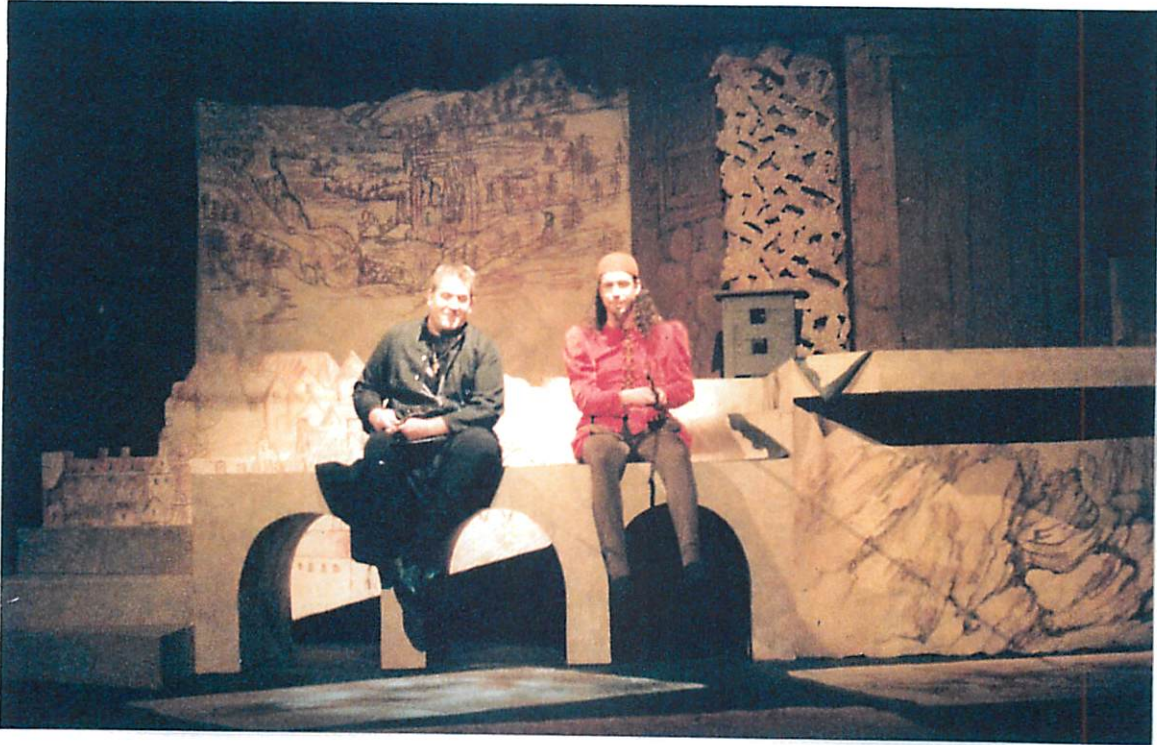
Villa & garden (stage L), hillside house (centre), town bridge (stage R)



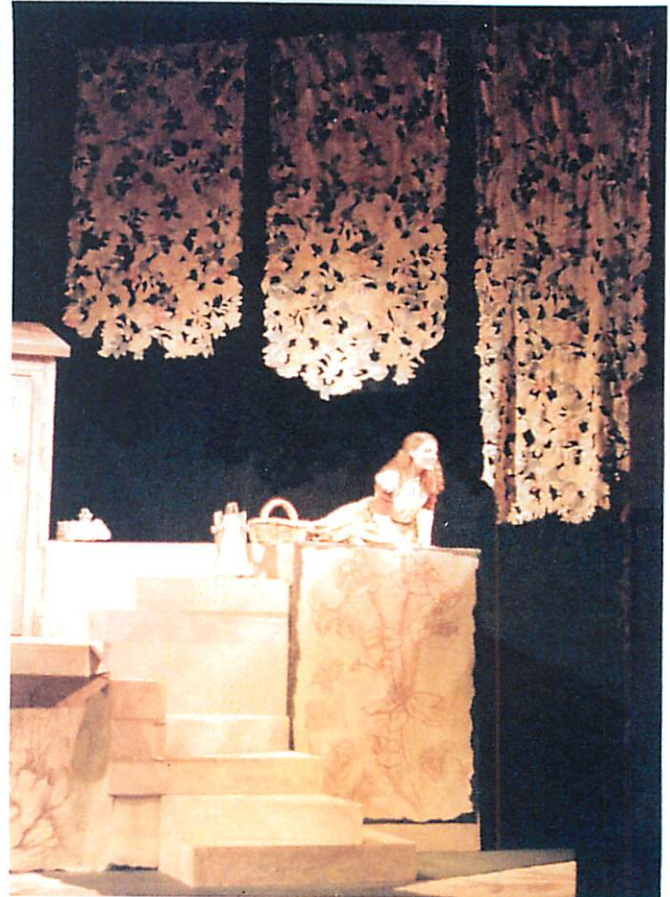
Shutter garden doors and partial wall swung toward centre stage

VINCI

Town Bridge with distant view (stage R) & humble hillside house (centre)



Hillside house



top of hill in the woods

SET EXPRESSIVE OF THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS OF CHARACTERS

The Trip to Bountiful (The Oakville Players 2000) portrays Mrs. Watts, unhappy in her son's Houston apartment. She dreams of returning, before she dies, to her family farm in Bountiful, abandoned years ago. Secretly, desperately, she takes a bus "home". To show her world becoming smaller and darker, sets became barer and darker. Act II closed with her in a bus-seat chatting sadly to a young passenger, isolated in a fading spotlight. Not a dry eye in the house! (Acts I & II Stage models & staging below)



Trip to Bountiful ~ Set which expressed emotions as well as locations

Act III opened onto cascades of willow leaves at dawn, then daylight. But long neglect is evident in a dilapidated swing, the porch, overgrown reeds / grasses, and scattered logs. She and the sheriff chat before her son and daughter-in-law arrive in their car for a reconciliation. At one rehearsal, the swing was accidentally bumped. Highly evocative, it was swaying gently as the curtain rose. In one voice, we all shouted, "Keep it!"

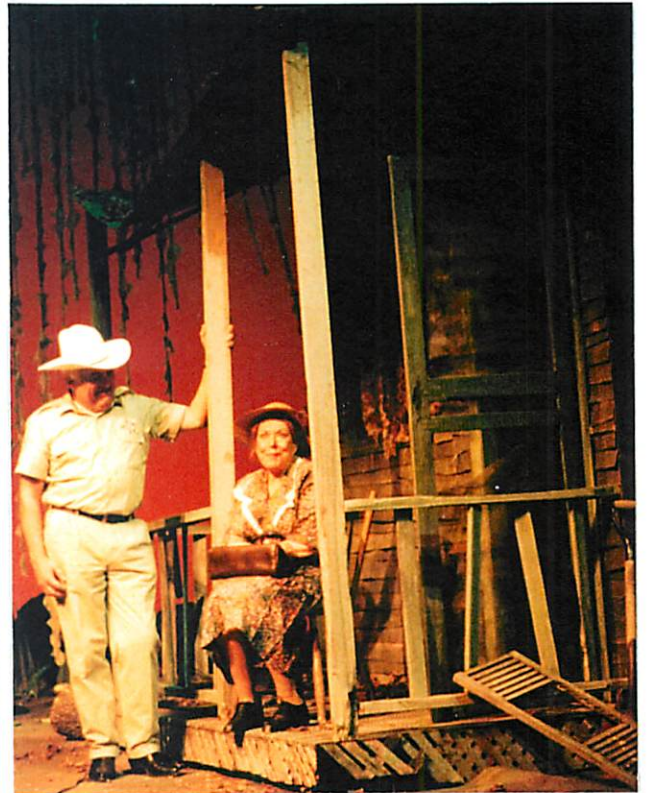
Nightly, as the curtain rose on Act III, the audience burst into applause, sighs, quiet cheers, and a bit of happy chatter. A patron told me afterwards that when the curtain rose, so did her heart. Just by looking, she knew that Mrs. Watts would be alright.



Trip to Bountiful ~ Highly textured Act III Set

Willow leaves were long pieces of polyester cut into leaf-like strips. Stapled to 8' long pieces of 1"x3" tied to several fly lines, they were flown in during intermission. Tall grasses were painted cardboard stapled to support stands. Rocks were fabric dipped in paint & carpenter's glue and draped over mounded chicken wire stapled to cardboard cartons. Field furrows were large pieces of old donated carpeting painted in various earth tones. The porch was a sturdy frame onto which strips of cardboard were stapled. We even attached an empty hornet's nest which we found near the painting studio. Set builders created the swing which was attached to a fly line.

In Acts I & II, a black mid-stage curtain hid rocks, grasses, "dirt". At intermission, the painted carpeting was unrolled to just behind the main curtain. The willow leaves and swing were flown in. The porch unit was rolled on, braced and angled just behind the main. After set pieces had been "built up", the painters enjoyed "breaking them down".



EXAMPLE OF WORKING THROUGH A SET DESIGN

The Winslow Boy (by Terence Rattigan, staged by The Oakville Players at the Oakville Centre for Performing Arts in 2007) is set in the drawing room of a house in Kensington and spans two years shortly before W.W.I. The director, David Nash, and I agreed that a full box set would best suit the period, characters, emotions, and action. No particular "visual metaphor" emerged from my repeated readings of the script. But I did add blues to the warm colour scheme, since the family had admiralty connections. David and I agreed that "the look" needed to be one of established upper-middle class and have an atmosphere of comfort and warmth. Action and dialogue necessitated a garden/patio, entrance to a hallway into the rest of the house, and entrance to a dining room. Since a fireplace was never lit, andirons and tiles were set down centre at the edge of the apron. Gobos of typical windows were set on the apron to further establish a substantial home.

In the drawing room, fabric was stapled onto flats as decorative dado and lower wall-paper.

In the hallway, fabric "wallpaper" was stapled above dark brown wainscotting.

The dining room also had fabric wallpaper with brown wainscotting.

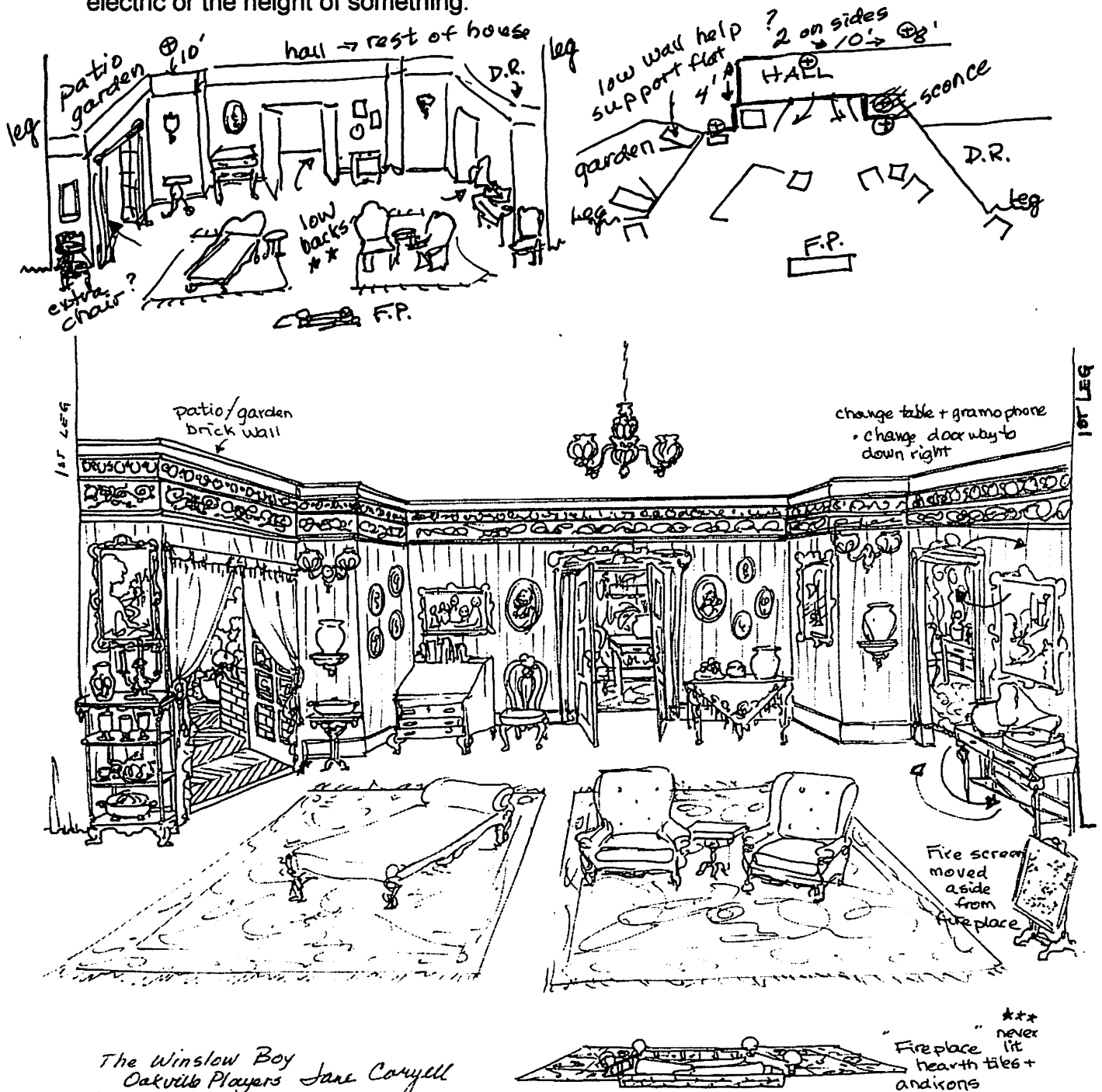
The patio wall and paving were red brick.

See also p.12 & 13



THE WINSLOW BOY ~ Thumbnail squiggles and early drawing

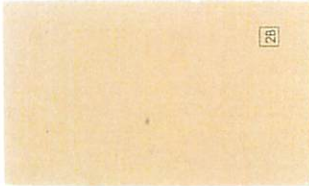
Thumbnail sketches are VERY rough ideas of the set, done right after or even during the script analysis steps. (See p. 4) They may never be seen by anyone else. The final version MAY follow these preliminary scribbles. Their main purpose is to visually record first impressions of the play and potential set. They are doodled reminders ~ "notes to self". The thumbnails below show my early thoughts about walls, furniture, angles, layout. They are not to scale. Some measurements are noted, based on my familiarity with the theatre, the group's stock and demands of time, work, materials. Closed rectangles = tables, desks. Open ones = chairs, sofas. Circled cross = an electric or the height of something.



An early drawing (reduced by 30%), with notes about moving the dining-room door, after consultation with David Nash. Later, I coloured the drawing with pencil crayons and added colour swatches of fabric and paint. (Hall & Dining Room on next page)

THE WINSLOW BOY ~ Colour Swatches ~ Dining Room and Hallway

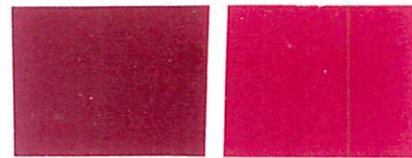
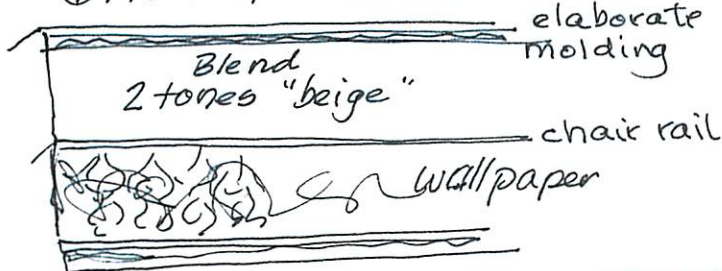
As a guide to colours on set, people in charge of painting, costume, set dressing and lighting each need colour swatches. I prepare several copies labeled with their location and/or usage. One is for the bulletin board in the rehearsal area. I get several pieces of paint color cards and cut the ones suitable as guides for paint mixing. Often, the head painter and I work from the group's stock of paint, to reduce costs. Sometimes a store's mistint serves the purpose. After all, a gallon of mistint is MUCH less than the price of a new mix. Sometimes, donated paint works, if it's not too old.



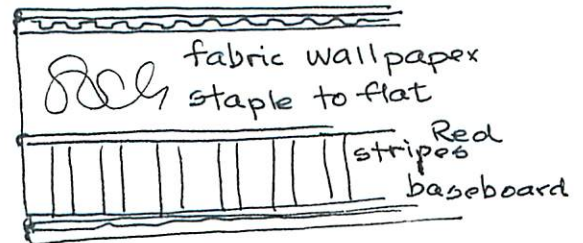
Blend 2 tones



DINING ROOM



HALLWAY



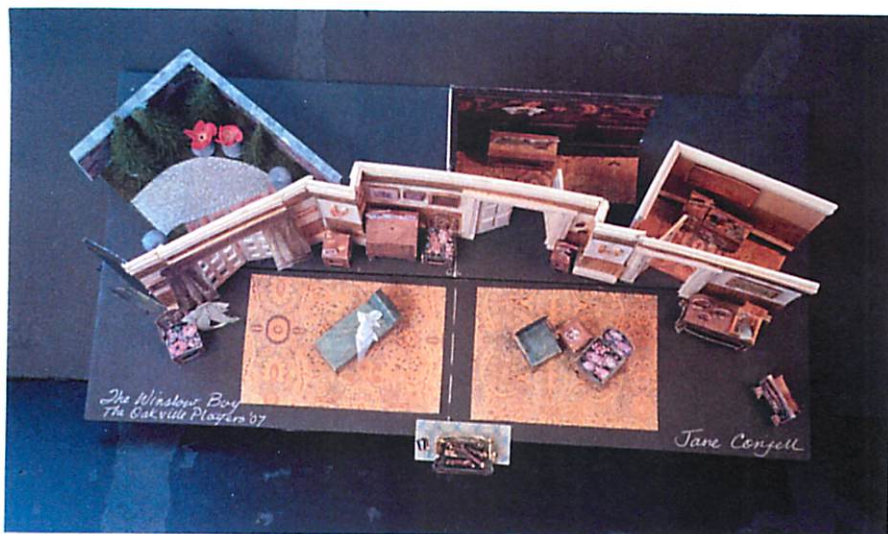
THE WINSLOW BOY ~ Patio / Garden outside the French doors, stage right

Sturdy (not floppy) vinyl was painted (latex) as brick patio and grass. It was pulled taut and taped to the stage floor. Strands of artificial ivy were stapled to the "brick" wall.

ADVICE: Wallpaper with brick pattern saves a heckuvalotta time and effort. But it isn't cheap. Other stone patterns are also available if the budget allows.



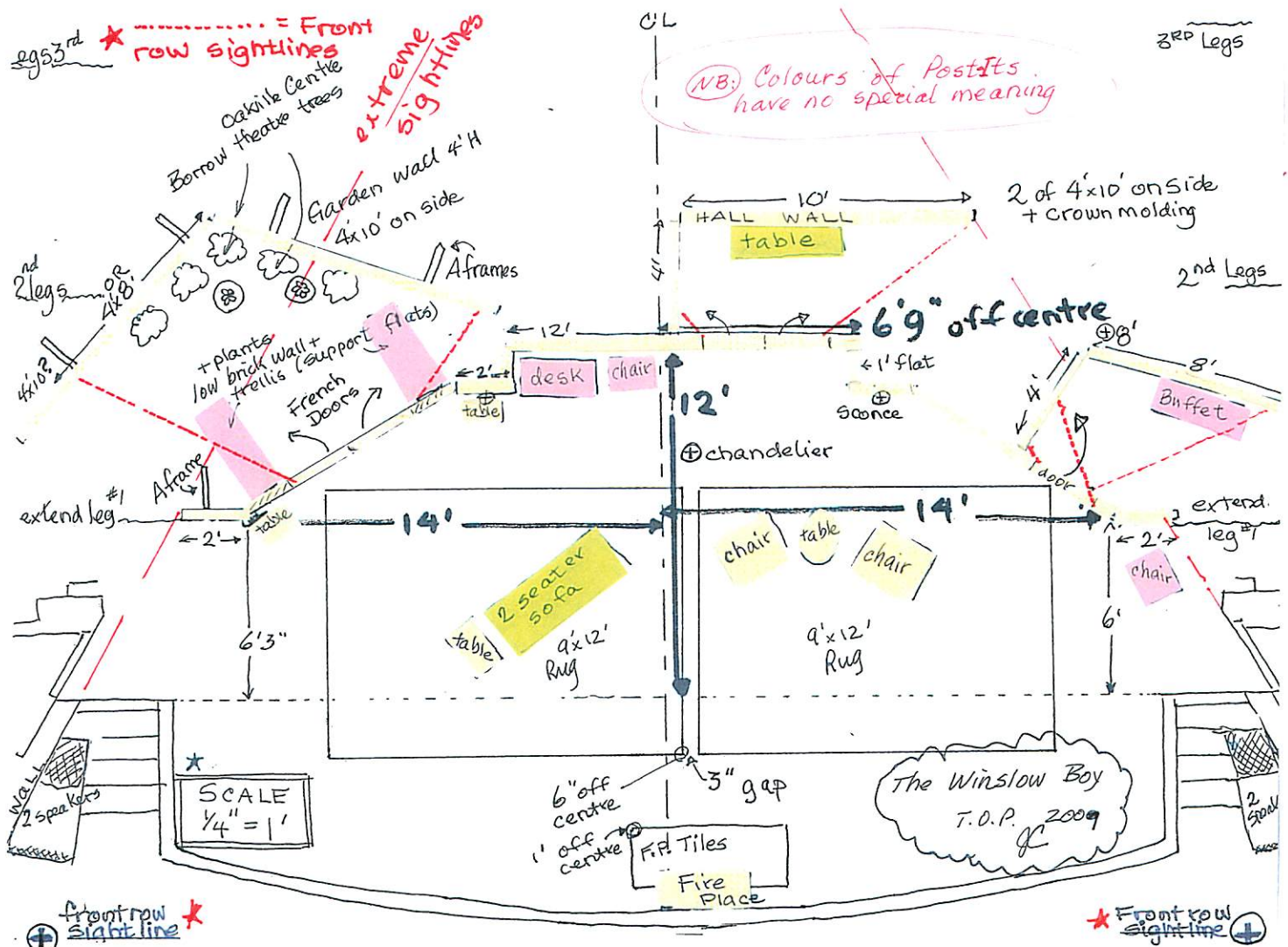
THE WINSLOW BOY ~ Maquette and On-Stage views



THE WINSLOW BOY FLOOR PLAN ~ SAMPLE USE OF POST-IT PAPER

Before or after doing a final coloured drawing or painting of the set (depending on the complexity of the set), I make a floor plan using post-it paper so that set bits can be moved as the director and I collaborate, and as I calculate sightlines. The plan is critical for several reasons. It shows what is visible within the given sightlines so that actions and important set items are seen by all the audience. It helps the director and actors understand the space they play in, since it is taped out for rehearsals. Set builders understand the scope of the creation. If the rehearsal and performance locations are not the same, the plan helps the stage manager and theatre staff get set pieces into correct position at the move-in.

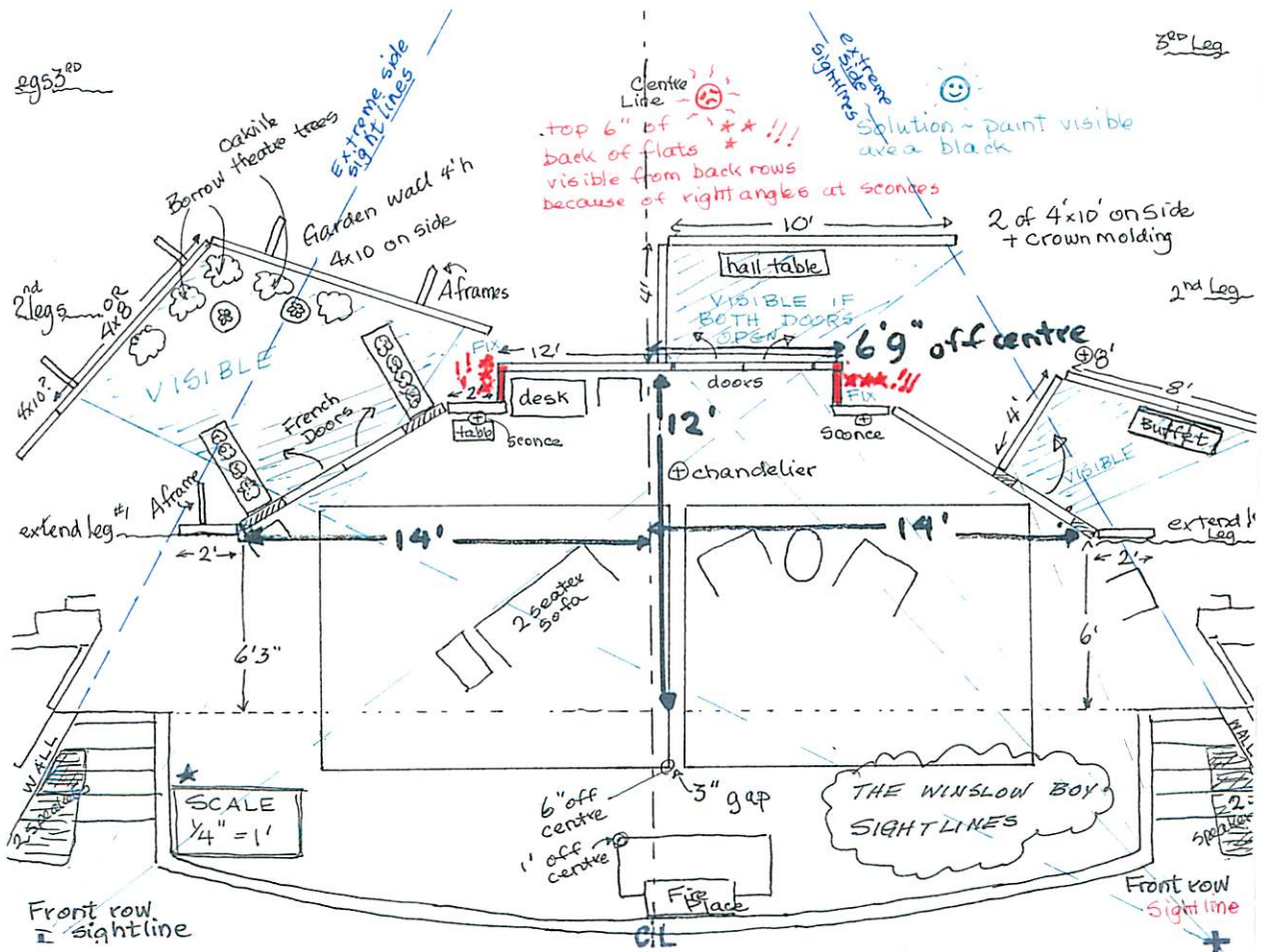
(The example below is reduced 30%)



THE WINSLOW BOY ~ A SIGHTLINE PROBLEM ~ TRUE CONFESSION

Even after nearly three decades of set design experience, I missed a foreseeable mistake in calculating sightlines. For flattage support and strong entrances, I gave the set right-angles at centre stage for the doors wall leading into the hallway. The other walls (dining room door and French doors to the garden) were angled to accommodate the extreme sightlines in the auditorium. My elevations had assured me that audience could not see over dining room or hallway flats when doors were open. Nor could audience see over tops of drawing room flats to the hall and dining room flats. BUT once we were in the theatre, I discovered that audience in back rows COULD see the raw wood of the backs of flats starred in red below. I had neglected to angle those 2' receding flats! I had not drawn the sightline from front row to the point on the diagram which is 6'9" off centre! Fortunately, the amount of raw wood was small. Fortunately we were using the black mid-curtain behind the set. Once we painted the raw wood black, my mistake disappeared. SHEER GOOD LUCK! Since then, whenever I use right-angles, I double-check sightlines to ensure backs of receding flats are not visible!

At the move-in, measurements of where flats are positioned in relation to centre line, the orchestra pit line, and the legs are vital. Much time is saved if critical points are labeled. I use my original since working from a photocopy can throw off measurements because of the slight distortion caused by copying.



THE WINSLOW BOY ELEVATIONS for set and lighting designers

Elevations are cross-sections of the set. One elevation shows set from left wings to centre. The second shows set from right wings to centre. They are vital to determine whether audience in the front row can look through an open doorway and see over upstage flats (like hallways) placed behind downstage flats. If there is furniture downstage, elevations show if important action and set pieces are blocked from front row viewpoints. If the auditorium rows rise toward the back, audience might see over downstage flats to upstage playing spaces. Elevations show what is visible from back rows. The lighting designer may also use elevations to help determine position of lamps.

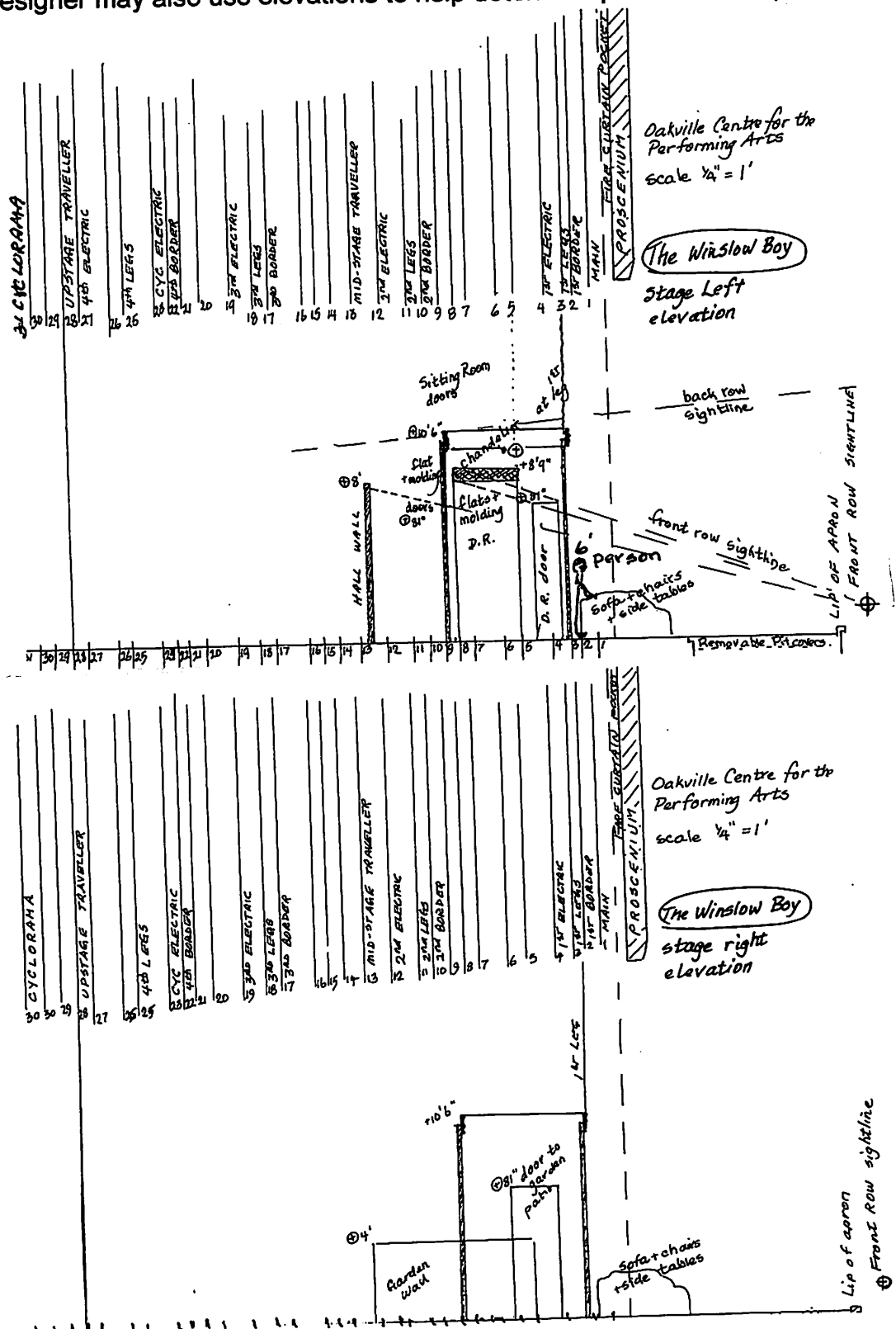
Theatres can provide a cross-section diagram of the stage and auditorium space in $1/8"$ or $1/4"$ scale.

Use tracing paper to keep original unmarked.

Avoid flying set pieces on linesets dedicated to legs, electrics, borders, etc.

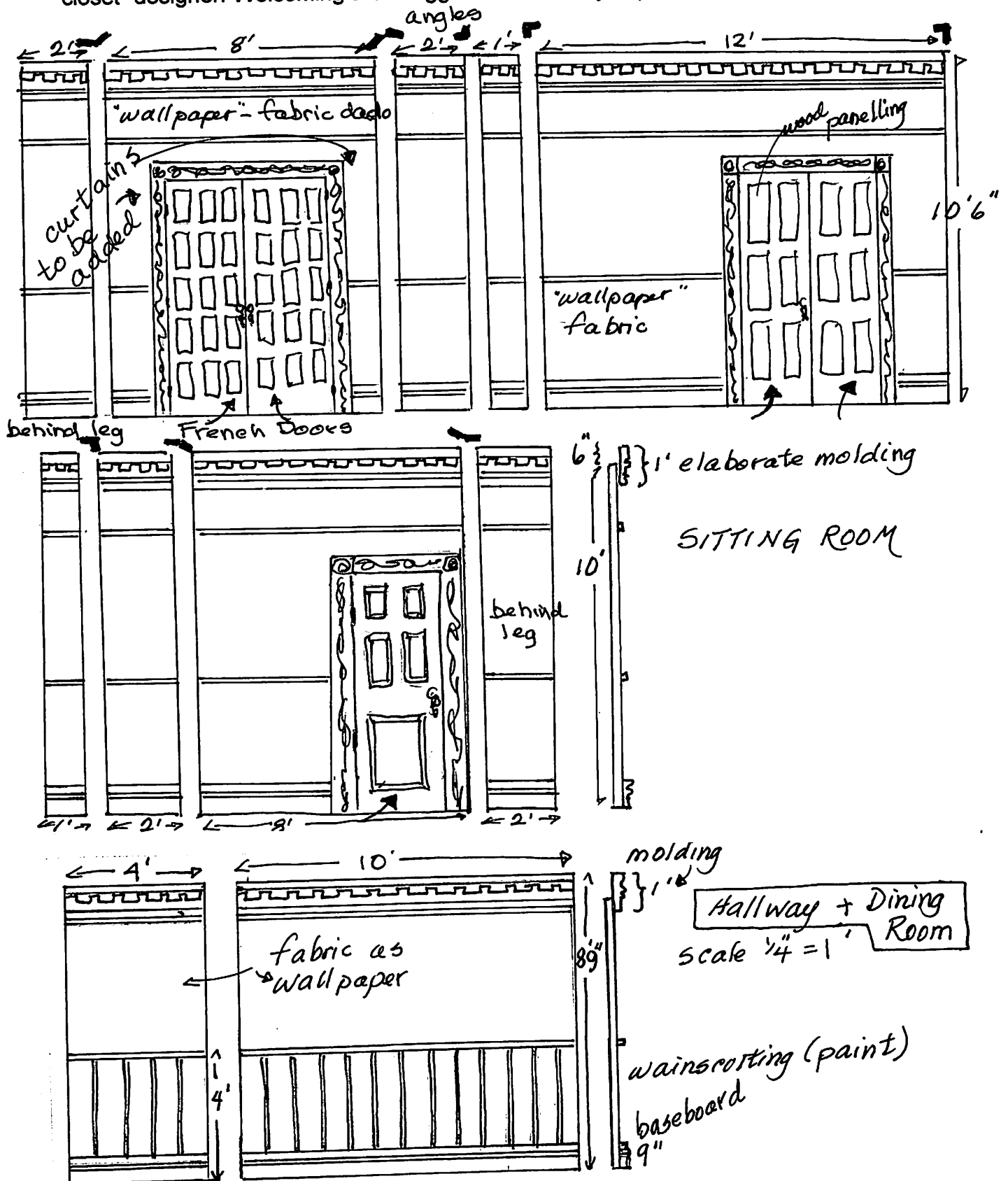
Ensure that nothing heavy is under the fire curtain.

These examples are reduced by 30%.



CONSTRUCTION DIAGRAMS for the Set Building Team

Usually, $\frac{1}{2}$ " scale is easily read and envisaged by the builders. The key is to lay out set pieces in a continuous line, using the audience's viewpoint. Re-using the group's stock of existing flats, doors, windows, etc. helps lower building costs, time and work. A side-view of the flat can clarify additional woodwork, like molding and baseboards. Often, experienced set builders suggest improvements to the set. Sometimes, a builder is a "closet" designer. Welcoming their suggestions will only improve the set.



SIGHTLINES PROBLEM ~ ANOTHER TRUE CONFESSION

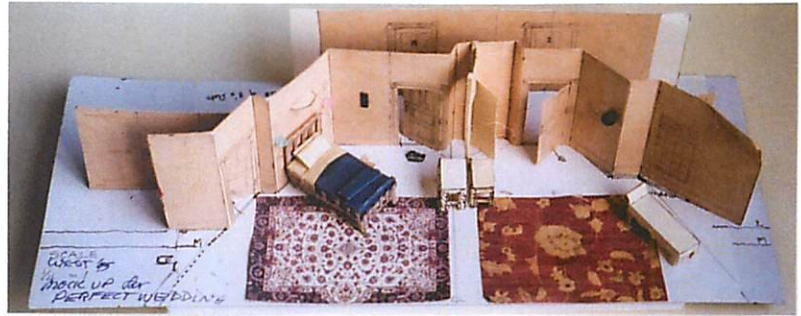
For *Dangerous Corner* (the Oakville Players 2000), I neglected to calculate sightlines from the back row of the theatre. When we set up at the Oakville Centre for Performing Arts, I discovered that, even though I had angled lines of flats to avoid sightline problems, audience in back rows could still see over the tops of flats leading to the hallway, stage right. They could also see the raw wood on back of receding flats behind the fireplace, stage left. (See model below.) To solve the problem, I arranged that black fabric be stretched across the tops of the areas that were visible.

The lighting designer nearly killed me. Of course, I'd cut off her plans for top and back lighting in those areas. **ADVICE: Avoid alienating the lighting designer!**



MORE MAQUETTES

For *The Perfect Wedding* (West End Studio Theatre 2006), I co-designed with Karin Quick. She did the coloured, detailed model. I needed a "sketch" model for my own references.



Proof (BurlOak Theatre Group 2009) was set entirely on the back deck of a house, with nearby garden/fence. Audience could see into the kitchen through an open back door.



Night of the Iguana (BurlOak Theatre Group 2008), needed 4 hotel rooms and a deck.



If We Are Women (The Oakville Players 1997) was set in a kitchen leading onto a deck with nearby seashore. Three scrim portraits hung stage right, as a visual metaphor. The house exterior idea was used in a CanStage production whose design we acknowledged.



MAKING THE MAQUETTE (STAGE MODEL)

ADVICE: At the risk of being viewed as obsessive compulsive, the more detail you put into the maquette, the better are the chances of the stage looking as you imagined the design. Often, even better, since several more people have participated in creating the vision. There's no real harm in being called "The Queen (King) of Detail".

Depending on the complexity of the set, I work in either ½" or ¼" scale. The larger scale, of course, uses more material and takes up more space. But most people can envisage ½" scale translated into real life. ¼" seems to be more difficult to visualize. Still, if the set is very straightforward, I use ¼" scale as a "sketch" maquette for the production team to have a 3-dimensional sense of what will appear on stage. 1" scale is unnecessarily large, even though sometimes shops for model trains and doll houses may carry useful items. The next few pages show how to make inexpensive furniture and other items from stiff paper, like manilla folders or cardstock.

Generally, I use matboard for flat walls, molding, baseboard, wainscoting, doors, sets of stairs, support bases and A-frames. I get scrap matboard free from local framers. Like flats, I cut pieces to the required size, paint them, and glue them together. Usually, this step is done before the construction diagrams, so that I work out the assemblage from the set builders' viewpoint. Matboard can also be scored on one side so that it folds for a series of flats.

It is helpful to construct a scale model of the stage performance space. You need only one for repeated use. For the Oakville Centre model, I used black foamcore for a sturdy "house" for inserting various set models into. It includes the stage floor, proscenium opening, legs, and cyclorama. Flylines and centre line are marked with a white pencil crayon. The orchestra pit is indicated with a post-it cut to size. (see p.55)

PROCEEDING TO THE MAQUETTE (scale stage model)

PERFORMANCE SPACE DIAGRAMS

NB: North American theatre is usually in inches and feet, rather than metric. The diagrams a theatre provides for you and your work will likely be inches & feet. If you are not familiar with Imperial measure, then a scale ruler could be useful. I find a plastic, transparent drafting ruler is invaluable. Canadian ones are half metric and half Imperial. American ones are entirely Imperial.

~ an aerial view of the stage layout, the wings, the configuration of any fly lines and pipes dedicated to lights, legs, borders. You need to determine extreme sightlines for audience seated in far left and far right seats in the auditorium. These sightlines are important to help rake (set at an angle) walls and items so that audience sees what's important and desirable on the set. You also don't want audience to see the backs of receding flats. You also need to determine how much is visible through doorways and windows, and past the edges of walls.

~ a cross-section of the theatre, including the auditorium especially if the seating is on a slope, rather than on a flat floor. You need to be able to determine if audience in the back row can see over flats to areas you don't want them to see. You also need to know if audience in the front row can see through doors or windows above flats which are upstage. Usually, the lighting designer likes to see elevations to help determine where lamps are best located. (see p.36)

The Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts, where I've done most of my set design, provides 1/4" scale diagrams. Some theatres use 1/8th scale. I photocopy them to 1/4" scale, remembering that enlarging and photocopying can distort actual measurements.

After reaching agreement with the director on ideas and sketches for the play, I usually do the floorplan. As much as possible, I incorporate walls, windows, doors, risers, stairs, fireplaces, even furniture from the theatre group's stock. Often, building new flats, windows, stairs and doorways is unavoidable.

To keep the Oakville Centre's diagrams clean for continued use, I cover an area about 1" square just where I will be taping tracing paper (onion skin) to the diagram. That prevents tearing the theatre's diagram as I remove or adjust the tracing paper. If the set changes between acts, then separate pieces of tracing paper are needed. I tape the tracing paper onto the space from the top step at the apron to the cyclorama. First, I trace centre stage line. Next, I extend the extreme sightlines from each side of the auditorium onto the tracing paper. Then I mark and number the fly lines. (p.34)

Occasionally, I use my floor layout of flats as the baseline of a drawing of the set. I simply extend the line of flats upwards for walls and doors, etc. More often, I free-hand the drawing. After it's coloured (either with paint or pencil crayon), I make copies for the director, stage manager, construction head, lighting designer, set dresser, costume designer, and theatre bulletin board. The more everyone has the same picture in mind, the better the chances of the actual set looking as I've conceived of it ~ often, even better.

On the preliminary floor layout, I often use post-it papers cut to scale size of flats, risers, stair units, furniture. That enables me to stick items temporarily in place as I calculate the best layout. (p.34)

Often useful is a scale model of the performance space. (p.55) Make it re-usable so that maquettes can be inserted into the "house frame" to help directors, actresses, and other members of the production team visualize the actual set.

Base for the Maquette

Usually, I use black foamcore for the base of the maquette, I make it the same configuration of the playing space ~ from the lip of the apron to the back wall or cyclorama or black curtains against which the play is enacted, and from left to right wings. Along the wings edges of the base, I use silver felt tip or white pencil crayon to indicate positions of proscenium opening walls, main curtain, legs, borders, flylines (linesets or bars) that hold lights, and spare linesets. (p.55) If necessary for clear understanding the layout of the set, I make legs of black matboard and glue them into position, with an A-frame triangle of foamcore glued to the back of the leg for support.

When the walls and furniture are complete, with small dabs of carpenter's glue, I attach them to the base for easy transportation. If things need rearranging, they can be gently pried off the base and repositioned. As long as the carpenter's glue hasn't been applied too thickly, it allows for changes of vision.

Flats on the Maquette

I generally use matboard for flats since it's sturdy and easy to paint. I lightly paint the back, as well, so that the matboard doesn't warp. For a row of flats, with shallow angles (returns) as the flats are arrayed across the stage, I lightly score (with the cutting blade) the vertical that bends open. For right angles, I cut and then glue, after painting.

Set builders will worship the ground you walk on if you give them right angles for construction and assembly. But sightlines may get in the way of such idolatry. Sometimes the audience in the back rows can see over the tops of downstage flats to the backs of returns (where corner flats recede upstage) especially if the auditorium space is fairly steep. The layout for *The Winslow Boy* (p.35) shows where the audience could see a little bit of the backs of the returns at the central doorway. Fortunately, the set was played in front of black curtains upstage. The problem was solved with black paint on the visible backs of the returns. Gaffers tape, with its matte finish, can also be used.

Flats, Doors, Windows, Woodwork on the Maquette

Matboard (free scraps from a friendly picture framer) makes perfect maquette flats. Its thickness usually matches the thickness of actual flats. A long line of flats can be cut from one piece of matboard. Shallow angles for returns can be lightly scored with a cutting knife and folded away from the score. Right angles need to be cut and, after painting, glued. Measure doorways and windows. Cut out the window panes. After scoring the side of the door that is hinged to the flat, cut the top and the opening side of the door. If it is shown slightly open on the model, the director, actresses, set dressers, and lighting designer have a clear understanding of the entrance/exit path.

Matboard also makes good molding at doorways, windows, tops of walls, baseboards. It also serves as panels on doors. Avoid white glue. It's watery and slow to dry.

Since matboard is like laminated paper, one side can be peeled away to make cutting easier, as with window frames. The peeled side will have a terrific texture for stucco, rough plaster, and concrete, if that look is desired. With a cutting knife, lift up a corner of the matboard, and gently peel off the layer of stiff paper.

PAINTING MATBOARD

I use small Prang watercolour cakes with a hockey-puck-sized cake of tempera white. They are easy to mix thin or thick. To prevent the matboard from warping because of water, I do a quick paint job of scrap colour on the back just before painting the front properly. Usually, I paint the top edges of the flats black as a reminder to scene painters to do likewise on the real thing. Otherwise, stage lights may reflect off the tops of stage flats or even create a slight halo.

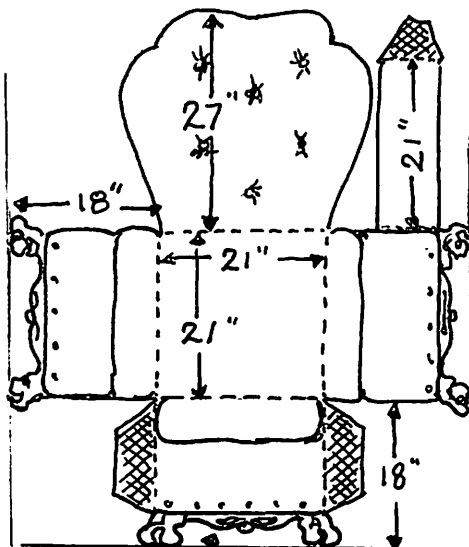
Various thicknesses and types of brushes give fine detail and texture. On molding, I often do a basecoat and added a slightly different version of it, either lighter or darker, for a sense of added dimensionality. That treatment is also a reminder to scene painters to avoid leaving just one colour of paint under stage lights. Otherwise, the paint job looks exactly like what it is ~ a fresh paint job. Most flats on stage need some texturing or "breaking down" to avoid a flat look (pun intended).

MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)

Since the following material is used in my workshops, you are welcome to photocopy it to work from.

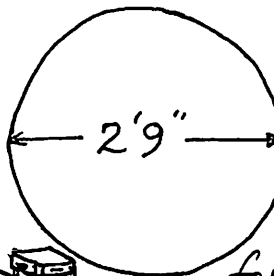
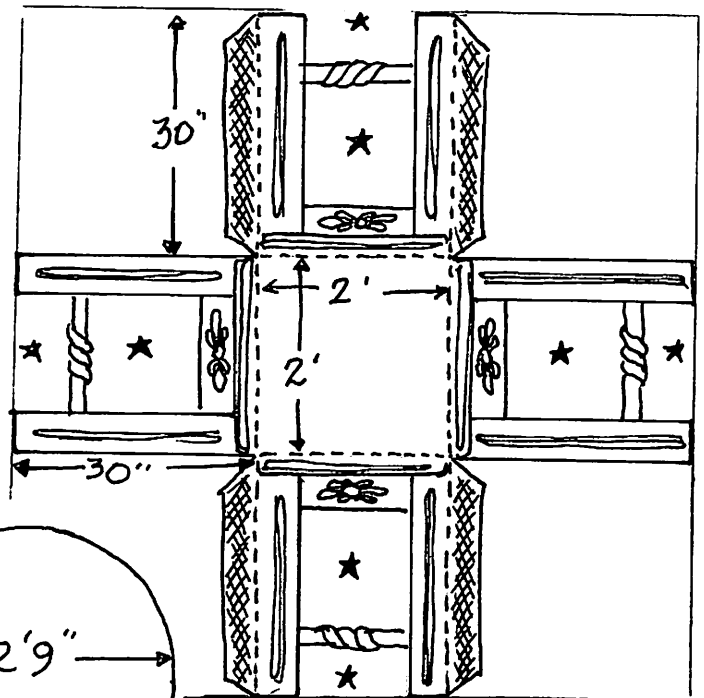
1. Measure and lay out diagram / outline with pencil & ruler. Ensure right angles.
2. Draw in details with extra fine pilot hi-tech marker. They should show under pencil crayon colours. If not, re-draw details after colouring is finished.
3. Colour with pencil crayon. For rich effect, use 2 or 3 versions of the colour. Work in a different direction for each layer of colour.
4. Also colour the back area, if it's seen on the model. This work doesn't have to be neat.
5. With scissors, score the fold lines. Be careful not to tear or cut through the paper.
"Score" means making a long scratch along a line where the paper will be folded. Hold the scissors wide open. Use the point of one scissors blade to GENTLY scratch the paper in one smooth, straight stroke. Use a steel edged ruler to guide the straight lines. Plastic or wood rulers can make the scissors slip and cut your hand!
6. Cut out interior spaces with exacto knife or cutter. Protect table surface from being cut.
7. Cut out entire shape with scissors or knife. Scissors that cut to a sharp point are best for angles and corners.
8. Gently but firmly fold to form the piece of furniture.
9. With a flat wooden toothpick, apply glue to tabs. Use Weldbond or carpenter's glue. White glue is too watery for useful work.
10. Stick tabs to inside surfaces. Hold for a slow count of 5. And grin.

Scale $\frac{1}{2}" = 1'$
 ----- Score + Fold
 3" 6" 9" 12" in real life



*nail scissors good
for curly edges*

*upholstered chair
without arms*

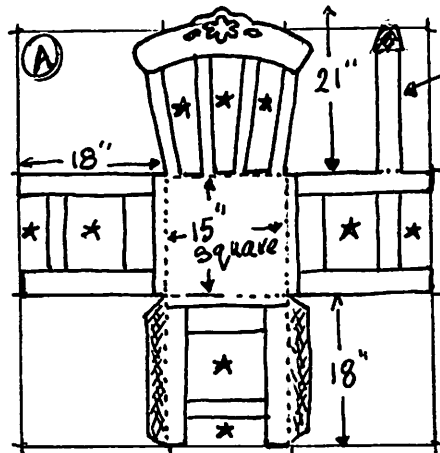


*diagonal of table top
for round top, if desired
Decorative Table*

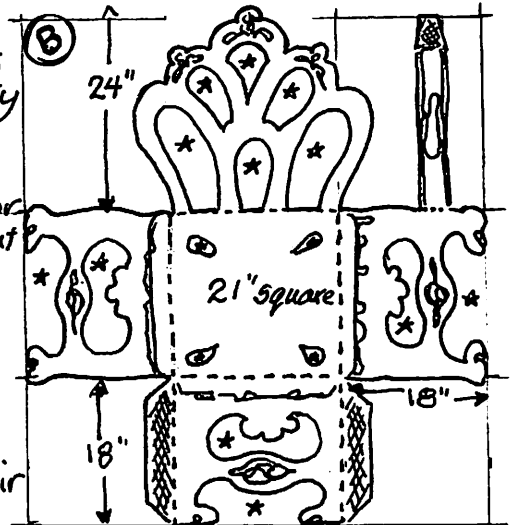
MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)

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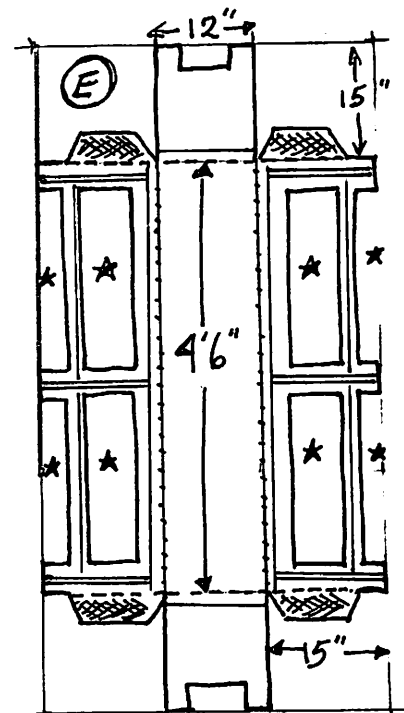
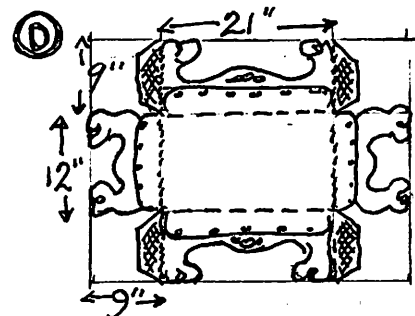
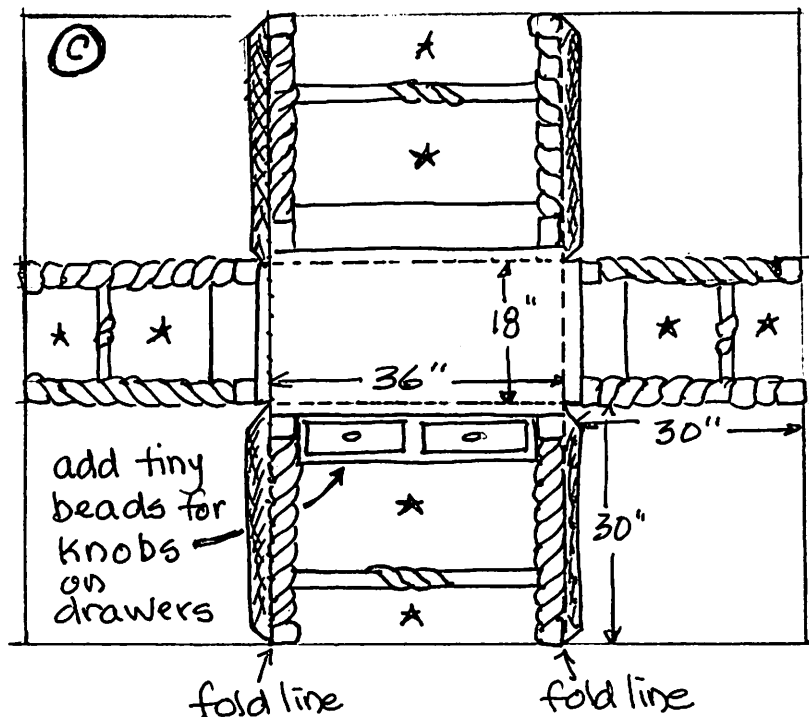
Although human bodies differ widely, furniture has fairly standard measurements. Since few theatre groups can afford custom-built furniture, what appears on stage is often simply what set dressers can find to meet the set design. The 1/2" scale patterns below use typical measurements. They may give you ideas of how to proceed.



fold "rung" across back for stability
fold line after scoring
★ cut out interior before cutting out entire shape
glue tabs (carpenter's glue NOT white glue)

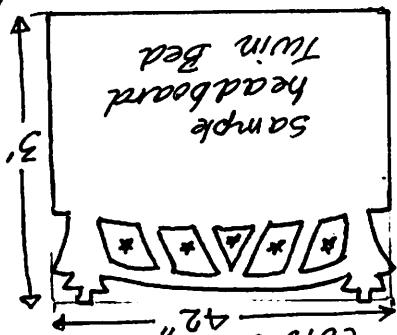


- A. Simple Wooden Chair
- B. Fancy Wrought-Iron Garden Chair
- C. Table (behind a sofa?
against a wall?)
- D. Footstool
- E. Bench

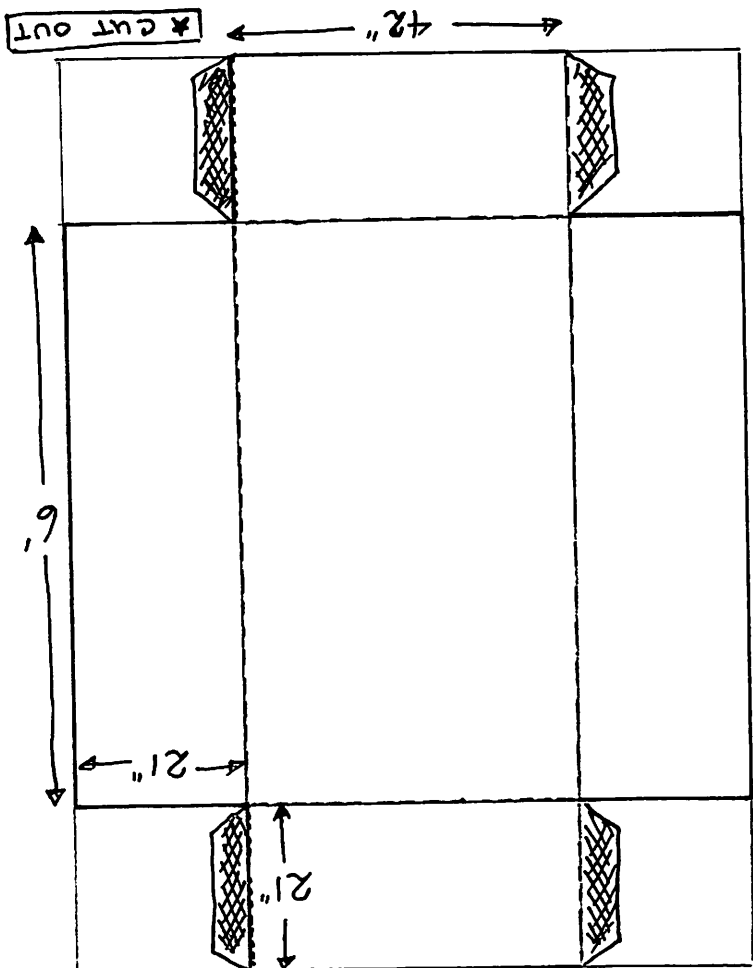


TWIN BED

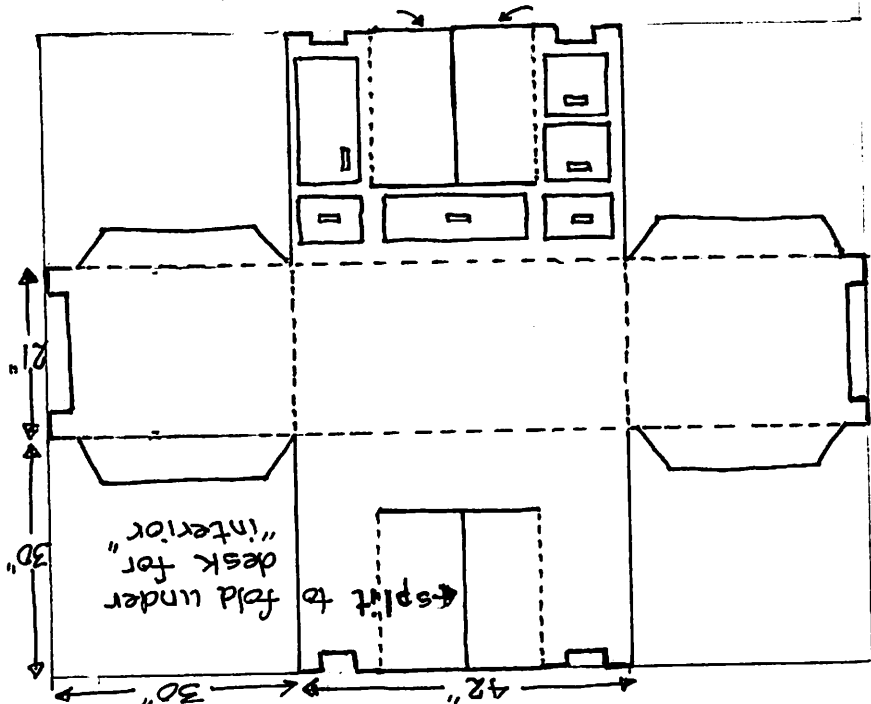
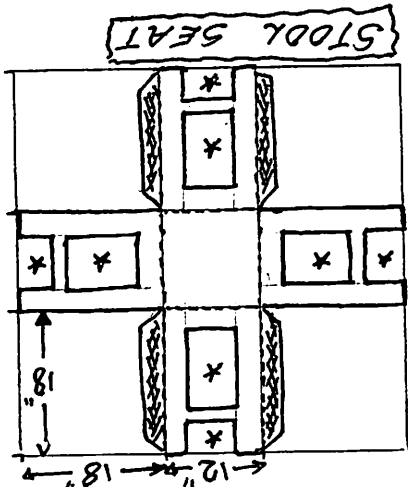
- Pillow - wrap and glue fabric around piece of foamcore
- Bedding - glue pieces of fabric or paper arranged as sheets and coverlets
- Headboard - cut separately + glue in place after adding colour



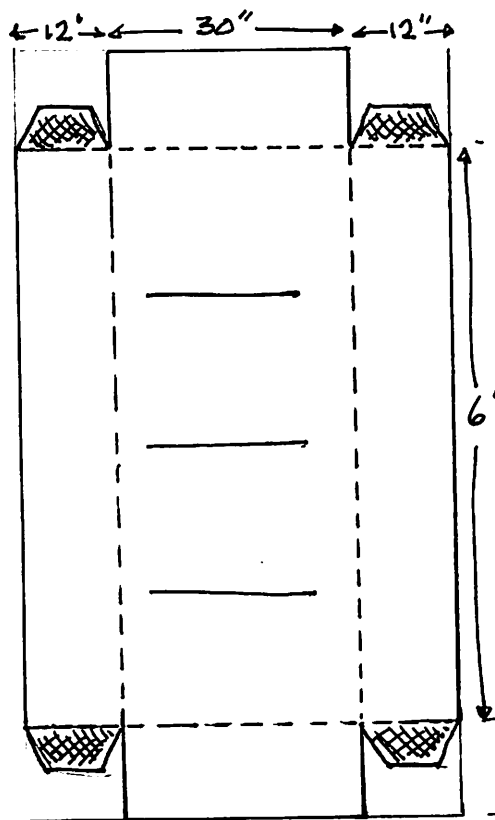
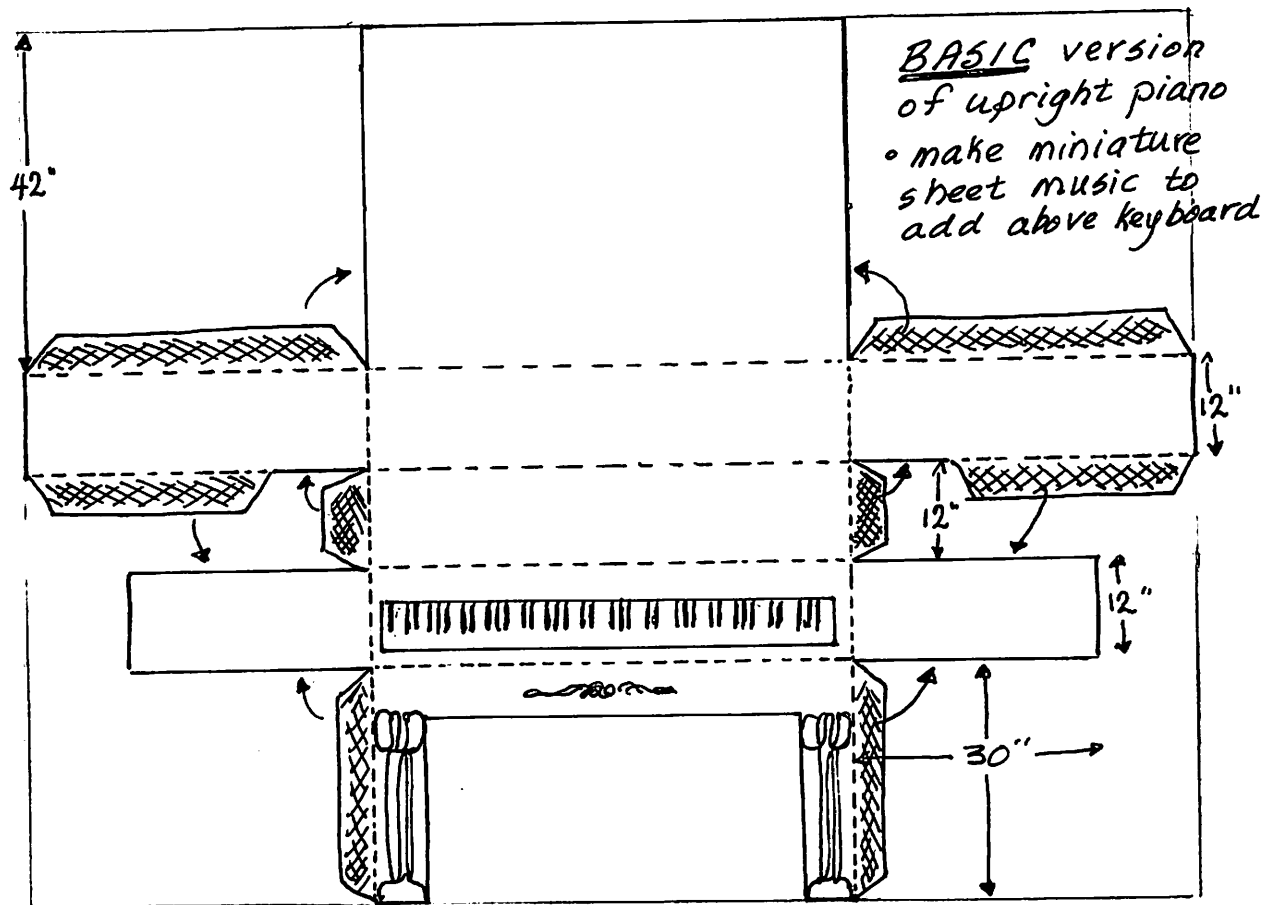
* If matboard is used for headboard, peel away one layer of laminated paper to make interior cutouts easier



DESK



MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)
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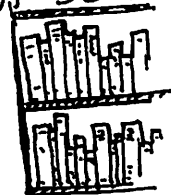


BOOKCASE 6' high 30" wide

- add matboard shelves - colour before glueing

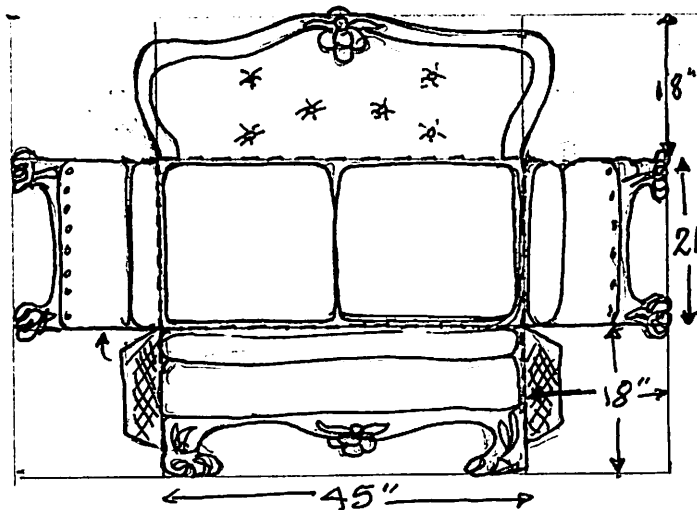
BOOKS

- from a magazine or catalogue, gluestick rows of books to stiff paper
- cut out rows
- cut $\frac{1}{4}$ " strips of foamcore
 eg:
- glue row of books to foamcore
- glue foamcore to shelf so that books run along front

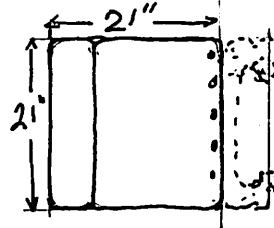


MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)

Since this material is used in my workshops, you are welcome to photocopy it to work from.

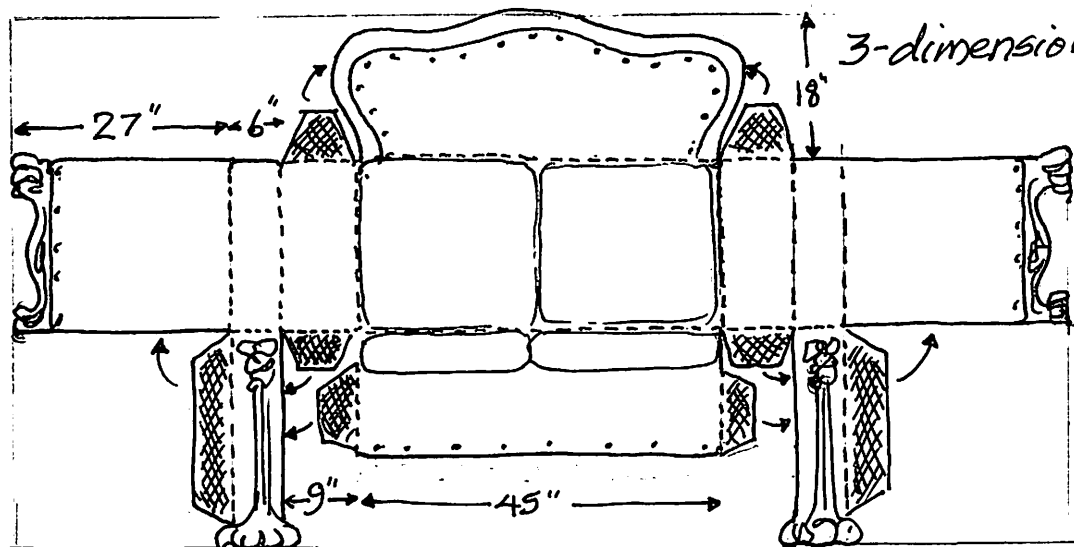


make 2
optional arms

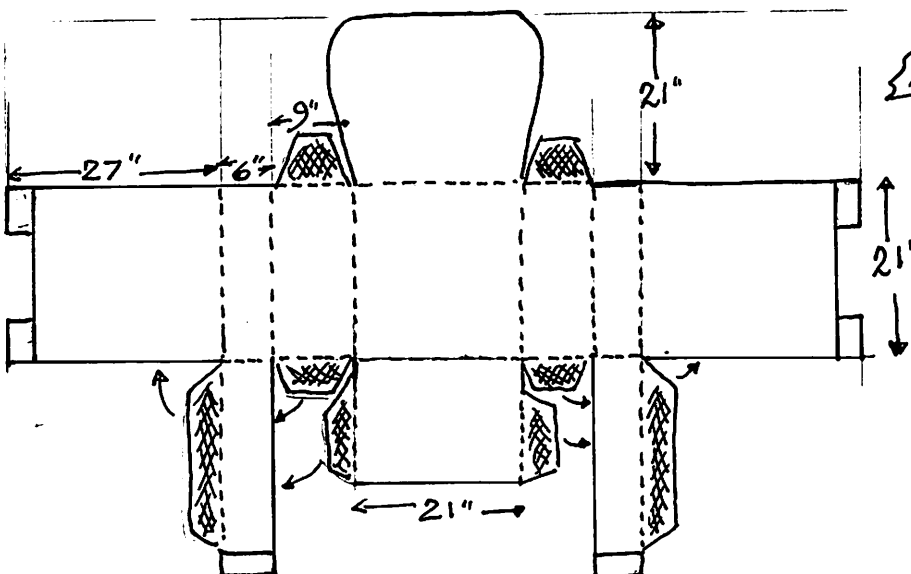


2-dimensional
arm glued
to sofa end
above legs

upholstered 2-seater
sofa ~ for 3-seater,
make 5' long

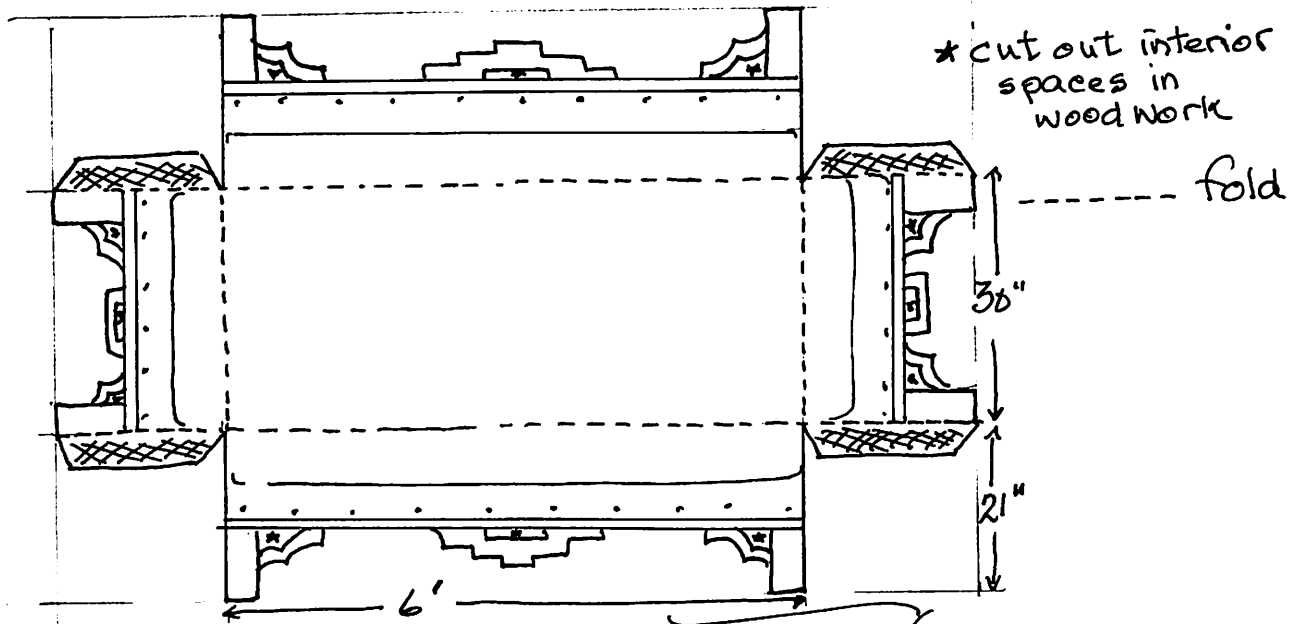


3-dimensional arms

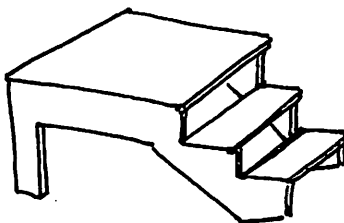
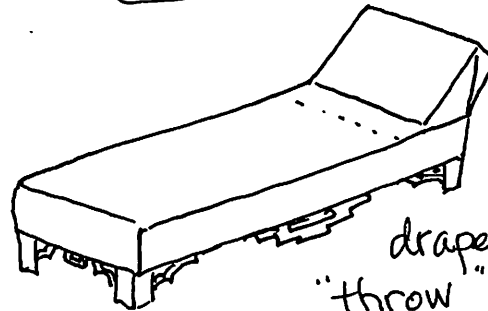
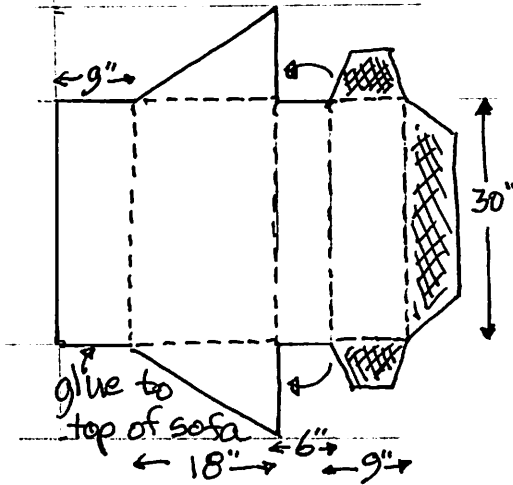


Armchair

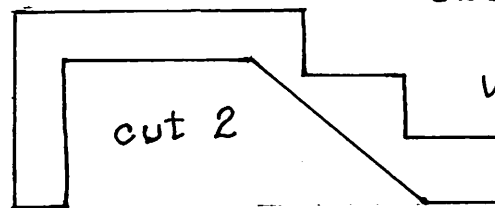
MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)
 Since this material is used in my workshops, you are welcome to photocopy it to work from.



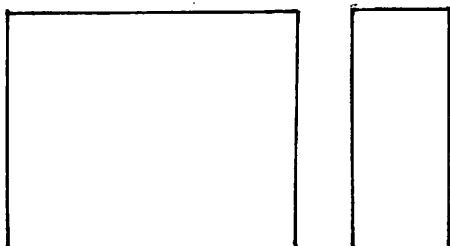
chaise



Set of Open Stairs ~ can be closed in with paper

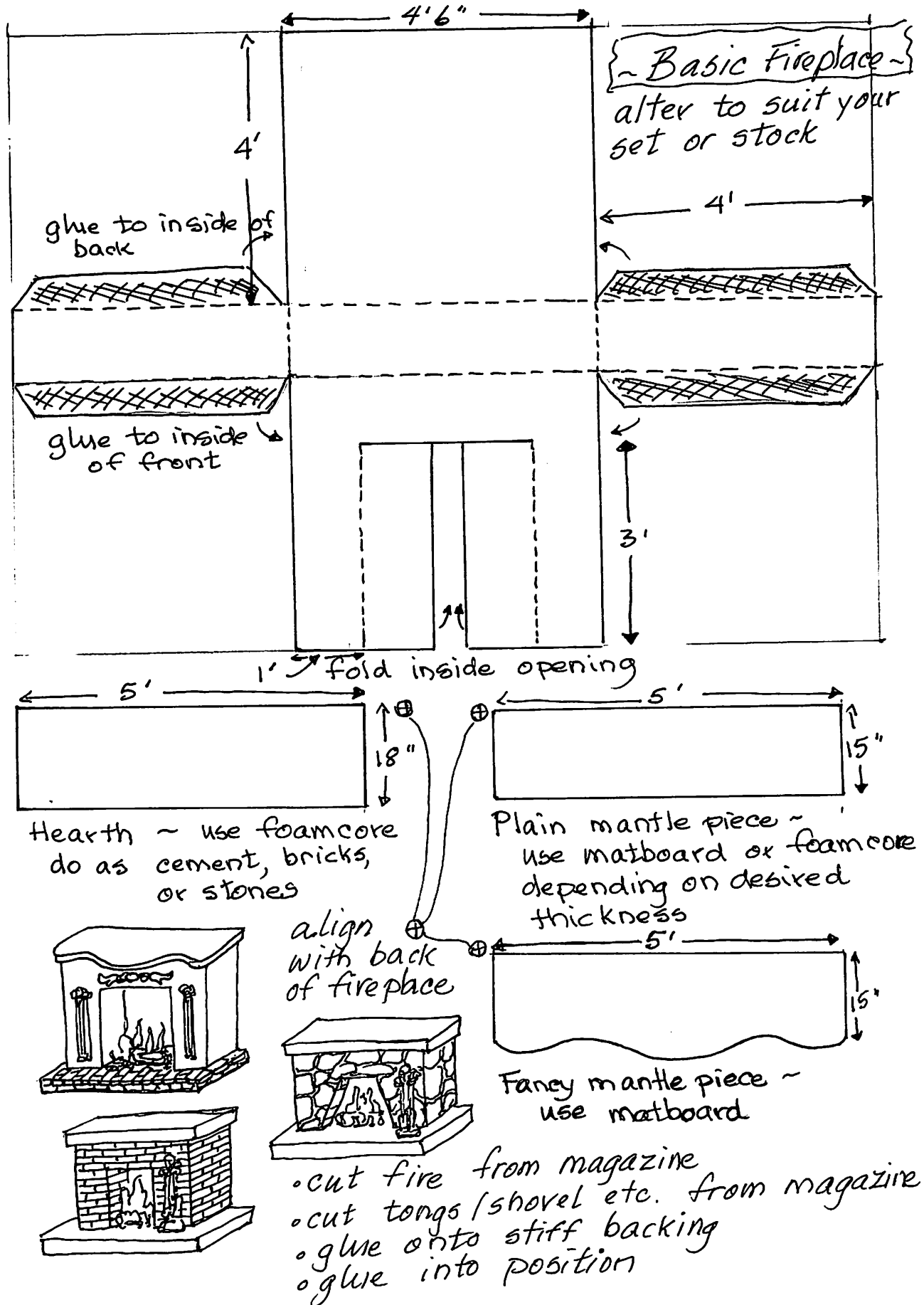


use matboard



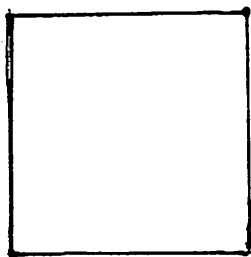
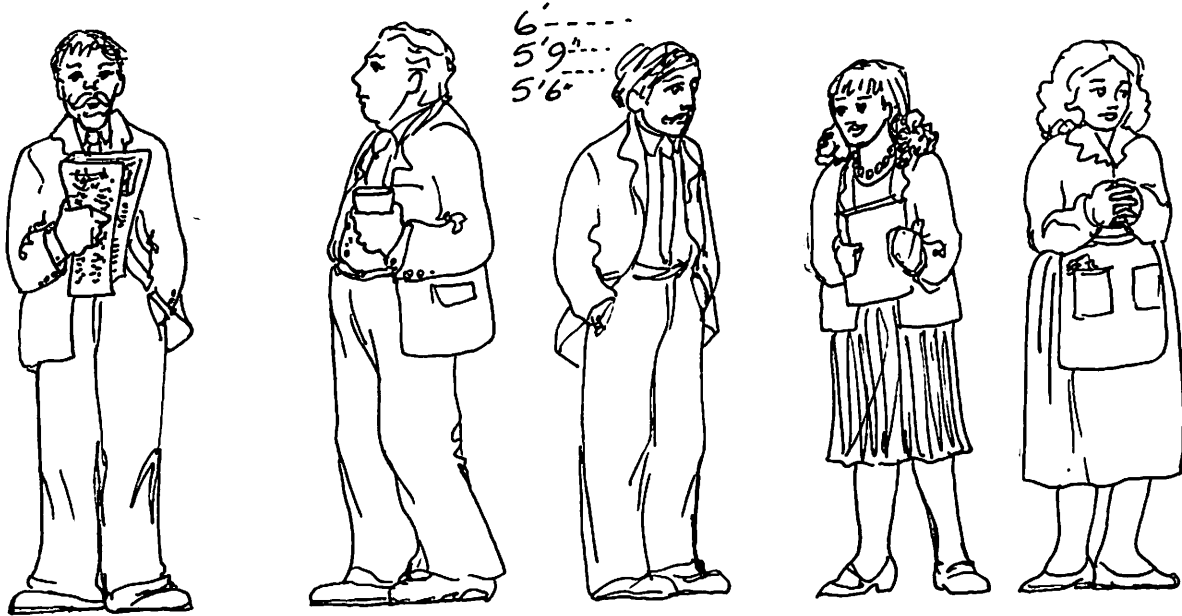
measure as needed for set design

MANILLA FOLDER FURNITURE (or other stiff paper, such as cardstock)
 Since this material is used in my workshops, you are welcome to photocopy it to work from.



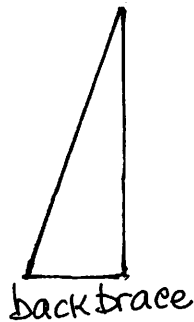
Scale Actressors for the Maquette

To give the director and actressors a sense of human bodies on the set, I make stand-up figures, usually like the characters in the script. Or I borrow figures from previous model sets. You are welcome to use these 1/2" scale characters.

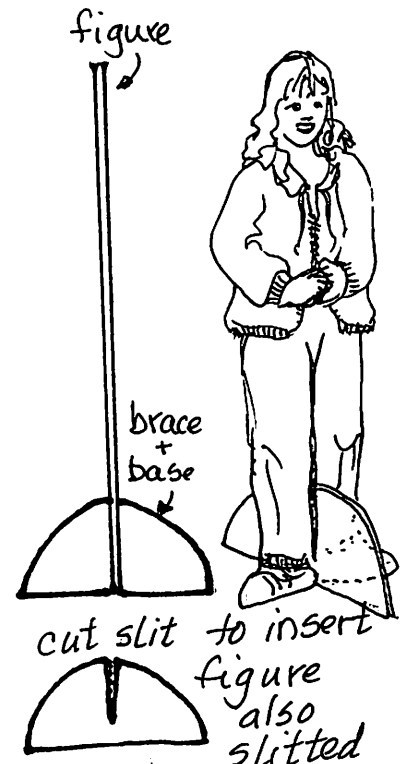
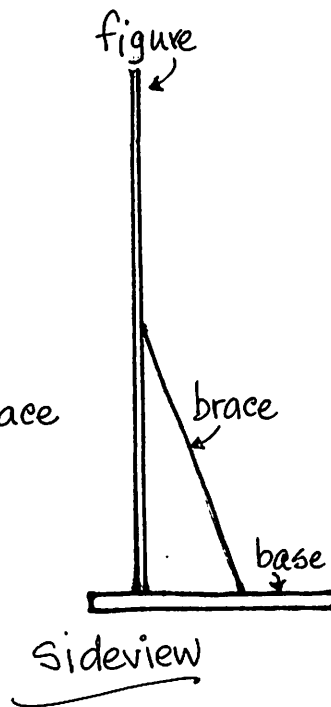


2 1/4" square
base (matboard)
+ carpenter's glue

very stable



back brace

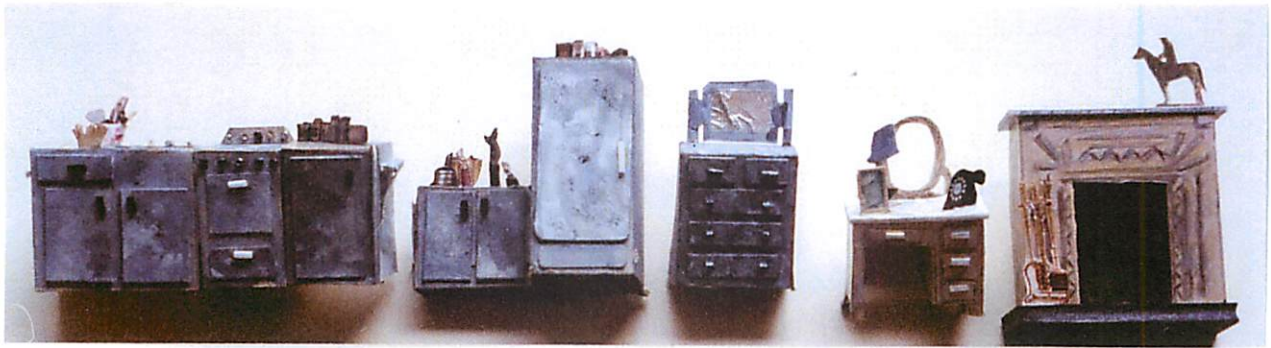


• slot together
• glue in place
less stable

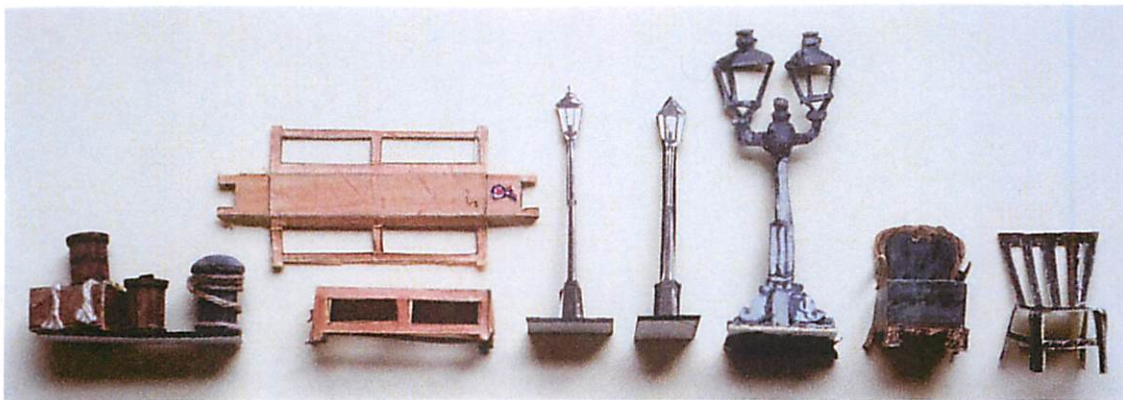
Keep model bits and pieces. They may be re-used, especially if they're based on what the group has easy access to. As long as the actual piece suits the set, precise model items aren't crucial. The set dressers will be resourceful and sensible.

ITEMS FROM SOME OF MY OLD MAQUETTES

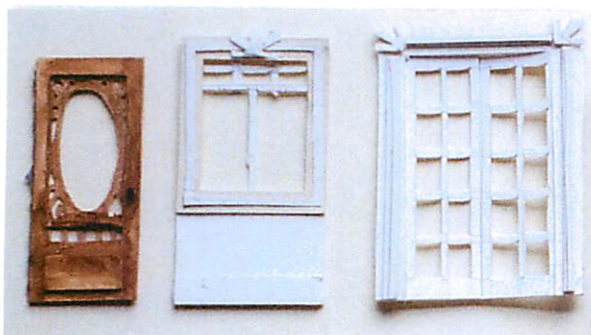
- A:** Kitchen cupboards, oven, refrigerator + kitchen items from magazines, bead handles
Bedroom dressers with aluminum foil for mirror, telephone / picture from magazines
Fireplace with shovel / brush etc. and horse sculpture from magazines
- B:** Crates & bollards for scene at a pier
Bench ~ flattened version before gluing together + final glued piece
Lamp posts ~ 2 cut from lighting magazine, double-light cut from matboard
Two chairs
- C:** Matboard Screen door before mesh added, window and French doors before painted
- D:** Workhouse gate for *Oliver* – pillars of foamcore gouged as stonework before painting
Part of wall for *Secret Garden* – pillars of matboard, beads on top, foliage cut with nail scissors from gardening magazine



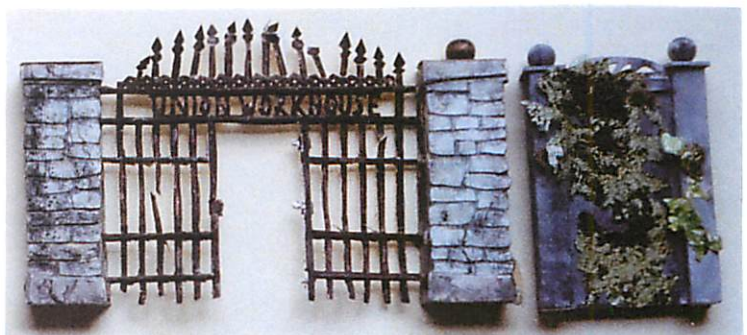
A.



B.



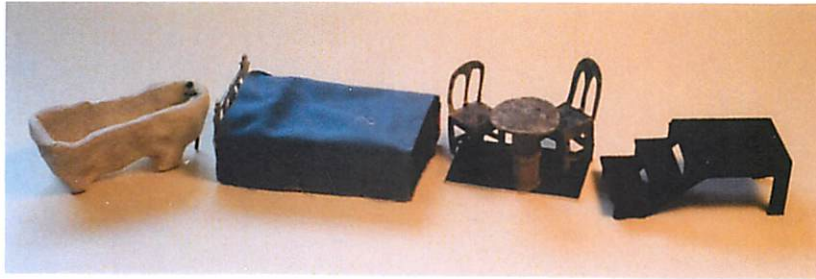
C.



D.

MORE ITEMS FROM OLD MAQUETTES

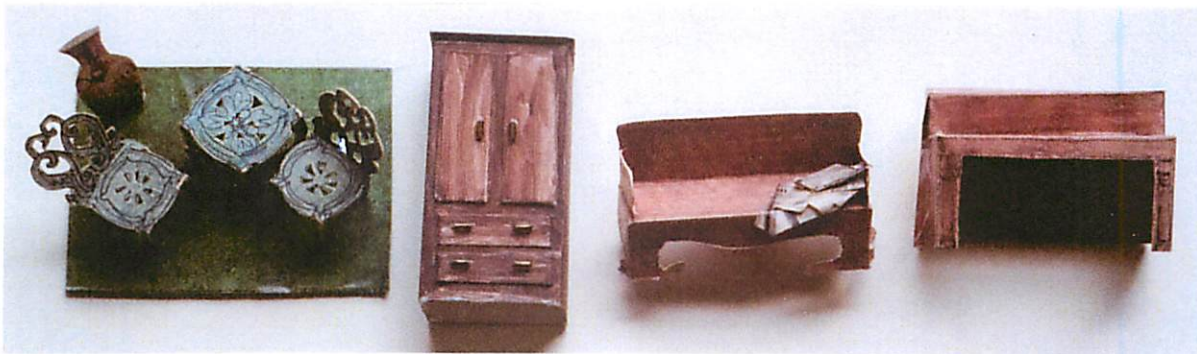
- A: Bathtub (plasticene), twin bed, chairs & round pedestal table, steps & landing
- B: 2 benches with newspapers on seats, gym bench, dresser, bookcase, 2 chairs
- C: Garden furniture and large urn, wardrobe, bench with newspaper on seat, piano
- D: photocopied and sketched human figures ~ 1/2 " and 1/4" scale



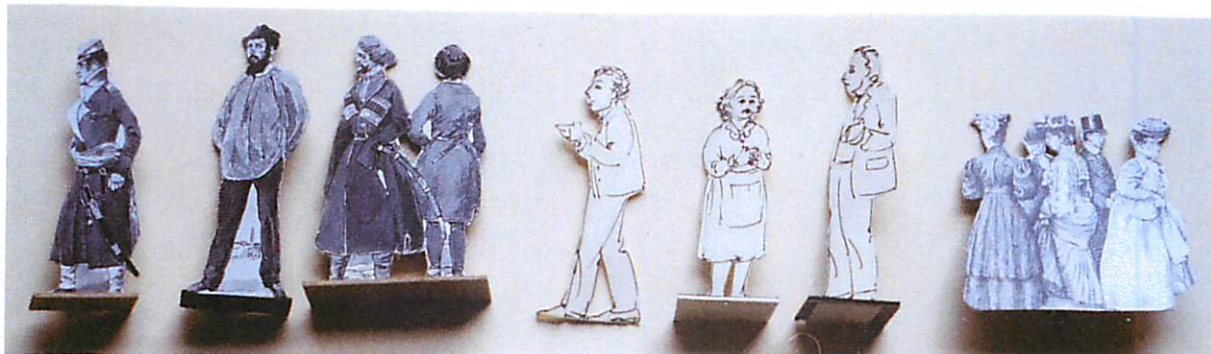
A.



B.



C.



D.

MY FAVOURITE TOOLS & MATERIALS FOR MAQUETTES & SKETCHES

- Blank computer paper 8 ½ X 11 is fine. Expensive art papers aren't necessary.
- HB pencils
- Steel sharpener usually gets a better point than plastic sharpener.
- White plastic eraser does a better job than pink rubber eraser.
- coloured pencil crayons. I like Laurentian. Some brands are woody and scratchy.
- self-healing cutting mat to protect table. If I'm not using the ruled lines, I cut on the back so that the random scratches don't wreck the ruled side.
- Mastercraft cutting knife with extendable, snap-off blades ~ both small and large AND/OR xacto knife with #11 pointed blade
- metal straight edge or ruler for scoring. To score along a wood or plastic edge is dangerous to your ruler-holding hand. Wood rulers often have a steel edge.
- ruler (plastic or wood) IN INCHES for measuring (I use 12" or 18" or 20" depending on job required). The transparency of a plastic ruler is often useful in measuring. NB: a transparent 12" GRAPH RULER is ideal ~ available in some art and craft stores. If you find a 6" version, buy two. (Keep one on reserve.) They're invaluable for measuring ½" scale furniture for the maquette.
- 6" steel ruler for measuring, cutting and scoring short measurements
- carpenter's metal tape or dressmaker's cloth tape for measuring actual furniture and other items needed on actual set. I round off the measurement to the nearest 3" for the maquette. I know the set dressers will simply provide what they can find.
- Scale ruler - only if absolutely necessary. After lots of practice with measuring in inches and feet, you'll actually start to see the world around you in Imperial, rather than Metric measurement.
- water-based paints – inexpensive watercolour cakes are fine – NOT watercolour tubes which tend to get messy and watery. Certainly not oil paints which dry slowly. My long-time favourite is Prang oval-8 Watercolours in a plastic case. Replacements are usually available. Curry's art store has been a useful source.
- Large cake of white (like a small hockey puck) tempera paint
- 2 water containers ~ one for mixing and one for keeping brush clean & paper towels
- a variety of sizes and types of paint brushes
 - ~ extra fine & medium & large that come to a point (Curry's series 2600 brushes are very useful, #4, #6, #8)
 - ~ flat brushes small & medium (Curry's 2601 Series are very useful)
 - ~ fuzzy stencil brushes small & medium
- manilla folders ~ light tan or beige or white ~ for making maquette furniture
- sharp scissors that cut to the point and are good for cutting paper
- nail scissors for cutting fiddly bits ~ NOT a substitute for larger straight scissors
- tweezers to get fine details glued into position
- plastic set square (for doing right angles)
- carpenter's glue or Weldbond glue. Ordinary white glue is too watery and slow to dry.
- A plastic lid to pour glue onto. Once the glue dries, it peels off like old sunburnt skin.
- Flat wooden toothpicks to apply glue, especially tiny bits on fine details. The rounded, pointed toothpicks aren't useful.
- Gluestick
- Restickable adhesive gluestick. It turns anything into a post-it. But it leaves a sticky residue on the glued surface.
- Small pieces of sponge (synthetic AND natural / sea sponge) for dabbing and smearing on painted textures
- Coloured post-its ~ 2" square and 3" x 5" are great for laying out furniture on floor plan
- Various sizes and shapes of beads (for doorknobs, drawer handles, etc.)

- Felt tip markers ~ especially Sharpie permanent extra fine, medium, larger chisel point
- Pilot Hi-Tecpoint V5 extra fine black pen for outlines, details, definition
- Matboard ~ Get scraps free from local framing shop for walls, windows, doors, table tops, molding, baseboards, tiny books stacked on a table NB: Peel off one paper side to make detailed cutting easier (eg: cutting out window panes)
- Foamcore ~ for base of maquette, stairs, supports on risers. The dense kind is best because the looser stuff cuts easily only one way. The shiny surface foamcore doesn't take paint well.
- Straws for pillars
- Large beads for flower pots, urns, table supports, fancy architectural details
- Tiny fake flowers / leaves
- ROSCO lighting materials / information ~ eg: bundle of gel colours to look through at maquette to help imagine the décor / colours under stage lights + collection of gobo cutout designs
- IKEA catalogues for images to cut out and glue onto maquette: eg:, books for bookshelves, pictures for walls, clothes / fabric / cushions draped onto furniture
- Garden magazines / pictures to cut out for plants indoors and out. When suitable, gluestick onto file folder before cutting out details so that plants stay stiff.
- Victoriana magazines for widely useful bits and pieces to cut out. That period décor has remained popular and adaptable for a LONG time
- Advertisements for carpeting, especially Persian carpets. Also suitable as wallpaper
- Pieces of small-scale corrugated cardboard for special architectural features: eg, tile roofing, Classical columns



**ADVICE ~ If you get serious about set designing, keep picture files of categories.
They'll be useful for research and making maquettes.**

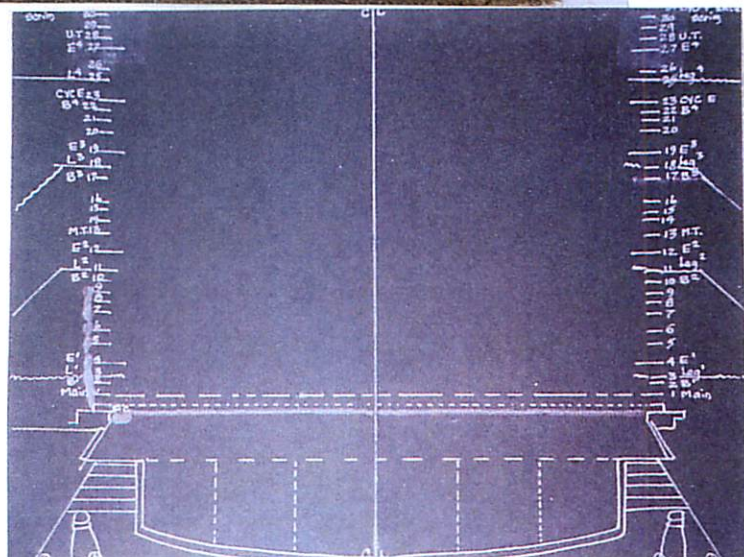
Doors/windows	Exteriors of buildings: roof, stone, brick-work
Fireplaces, fire-screens	Floors, floor coverings, tiles, carpets, rugs
Furniture: chairs, sofas, tables, etc.	Gardens, plants
Lamps, Lighting	Miscellaneous: fences, molding, bathrooms
Stairs: railings, balustrades	Walls, tiles, screens, wallpaper, ceilings
The Whole Look ~ entire rooms	Victoriana (a highly adaptable historical era)

**Set up your work space with VERY good lighting.
BE PREPARED TO PUT IN A LOT OF HOURS FOR A PRODUCTION.**

ADVICE: If you design several times for the same theatre, a re-usable shell of the stage for your models can help others better imagine your ideas. Below is what I use frequently for productions at the Oakville Centre for Performing Arts.

The 1/2 "scale shell and stage floor are made with black foamcore. Diagrams are made with white pencil crayon. The cyclorama upstage is white foamcore. The white square down centre on the apron of the shell marks the orchestra pit opening. The white diagonal lines from the proscenium towards the cyc delineate the extreme sight-lines for audience seated near the walls on each side of the auditorium. The white markings at the sides of the floor lay out and label the linesets. They remind me to avoid using ones dedicated to electrics, legs, borders, mid-traveller, scrim, cyclorama. At the proscenium, the fire curtain is marked as a reminder to avoid setting anything heavy underneath it. The dotted line across the apron at the top of the steps is the line we measure from to get set pieces positioned correctly up and down stage. It is the line of removable segments above the orchestra pit. (If you understand all of that, you're brilliant!)

Top piece of foamcore is brace and a support for hanging bits intended to be flown on designated linesets.



HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR SET DESIGN AND PAINTING

(Some may be out of print. I bought them in the 1980's when I was starting out)

Aronson, Arnold. *American Set Design*. Theatre Communications Group, Inc. 1985 ~ images of various styles of sets, especially realism ISBN: 930452-39-9 (paperback)

Bablet, Denis (1977). *The Revolutions of Stage Design in the 20th Century*. Paris: Leon Amiel. ISBN 0-8148-0652-X

Buerki, F.A. (1945). *Stagecraft for Nonprofessionals*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. ISBN 9-299-01294-8

Burian, Jarka. *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda*. Wesleyan University Press. 1971 ~ ideas of abstract and conceptual sets ISBN: 0-8195-6032-4

Gascoigne, Bamber (1968). *World Theatre An Illustrated History*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. Library of congress # 68-22899

Harwood, Ronald (1984). *All the World's a Stage*. London: Methuen. ISBN 0-413-53840-0

Hemming, Charles (1985). *Paint Finishes*. Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books Inc. ISBN 0-89009-909-X

Nelms, Henning (1970). *Scene Design: A Guide to the Stage*. New York: Dover Publications. ISBN 0-486-231453-4

Parker & Smith. *Scenic Design and Stage Lighting*. 5th ed.

Payne, Darwin Reid. (1984). *The Scenographic Imagination*. Southern Illinois University Press. ISBN: 0-8093-1109-0

Rowell, Kenneth (1968). *Stage Design*. London: StudioVista. ISBN 28-27758-2

Sloan, Annie & Kate Gwynn (1990). *The Complete Book of Decorative Paint Techniques. The Definitive step-by-step guide to paint finishes and interior decoration techniques*. Portland House. ISBN 0-517-02265-6

Veaner, Daniel (1984). *Scene Painting tools and Techniques*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. ISBN 0-13-791641-8

Also....

SKETCHUP, available on Google, is a free 3-D design program popular with set designers. Being a self-confessed techno-twit, I don't use it. Besides, I can draw and paint reasonably well, if I do say so myself. And I love working at my desk, facing a window overlooking the neighbouring trees and houses, with glimpses of the lake, and views of lovely skies and sunlight. Lucky me!

THE JOY OF SETS

Handbook of Set Design for Community Theatre

Dr. Jane Coryell

Pictured below ~ Dr. Coryell with 1/2" scale maquette of *Ring Round the Moon* presented by The Oakville Players
At Oakville Centre for Performing Arts, 2001

Since 1979, Dr. Jane Coryell has designed over 100 plays for community theatre groups, schools, and professional companies in and near Oakville, Ontario. For most of those productions, Jane was head scenic artist and painting coordinator. Her design work has received 9 awards and 6 nominations with Theatre Ontario. In 2002, Oakville Centre for Performing Arts recognized Jane's outstanding contributions to theatre at the Centre with their prestigious annual Appreciation Award. In 2006, she received Oakville's Community Spirit Award for volunteerism in the Arts. For 20 of her 30 years of high school teaching, Jane taught Creative Drama from grades 9 – 11. For 15 years of her teaching career, she taught Visual Art. To coach others in set design and scene painting, she does workshops for schools and amateur groups.

