Lady Windermere's Fan: The Black and White of It

Jacob L. Heger
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jacobheger@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/hixsonliedstudent
Part of the Theatre and Performance Studies Commons

LADY WINDERMERÉ’S FAN
THE BLACK AND WHITE OF IT

by

Jacob Lawrence Heger

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Theatre Arts

Under the Supervision of Professor Sandy Veneziano

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2012
LADY WINDERMER’S FAN

THE BLACK AND WHITE OF IT

Jacob Lawrence Heger, M.F.A

University of Nebraska, 2012

Adviser: Sandy Veneziano

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the process used to create the scenic design for the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s 2011 production of Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan, A Play About a Good Woman*. Within this paper I will look at the process used to create the set design, the execution of the set design and the final product when seen in a fully realized production.
Table of Contents

Chapter One: Show Acquisition ................................................................. 1
Chapter Two: Production Team ................................................................. 4
Chapter Three: Initial Thoughts and Research .......................................... 7
Chapter Four: Research ........................................................................... 12
Chapter Five: Discussions with the Director ............................................. 18
Chapter Six: Model .................................................................................. 22
Chapter Seven: Design Process ................................................................. 31
Chapter Eight: Final Thoughts ................................................................. 48
Appendix A: Research Images ................................................................. 50
Appendix B: Drawings ............................................................................. 62
Appendix C: Show Images ....................................................................... 75
Bibliography .............................................................................................. 85
Works Consulted ....................................................................................... 88
Chapter One: Show Acquisition

I first received word that we were producing Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan, A Play About a Good Woman* in the winter of 2011. I do not recall exactly when this happened but I know that the school was chattering about who was to design what even before the season was finalized and announced. I knew I was interested in this show from the beginning. Carrie Lee Patterson was directing and she is a professional actor and director as well as the department’s professor of practice. The show was also in the second slot of the fall semester, perfect for a thesis process. I also loved the idea of working on an Oscar Wilde play. However, once the entire season was finalized the actual discussions about who was doing what began and no one was happy. Brandi Kawamoto, a fellow scenic design graduate student, was seriously interested in designing *The Three Musketeers*, directed by Dr. Ian Borden the acting, directing, and stage combat faculty member. I was interested in designing *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. However, Sandy Veneziano, the scenic design faculty and our advisor, had other ideas for us, none of which we were at all interested in.

Veneziano’s logic was that Kawamoto had already worked with Virginia Smith, an acting and directing faculty member who was to direct the first show of the season, *Bright Ideas*. Kawamoto would work with Patterson on *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and I, subsequently, would design *Bright Ideas*, directed by Smith. In order to “fight” this battle with logic and a solid defense, I got the only existing copy of *Bright Ideas* from Smith and thoroughly read the play. Needless to say, I was less than impressed and uninspired by the script. I made no apologies about this and returned the script to Smith.
She asked “How’d you like it?!” I responded with a sour face. “You didn’t like it” she said in a deflated but matter-of-fact fashion and I confirmed with a polite but blunt “No, I didn’t.” She took it as well as anyone who is enthusiastic about a play could. She turned to walk away with her head high and ego only slightly damaged, but only temporarily.

Now that I had a clear understanding of my potential *Bright Ideas* destiny I spoke to Kawamoto to get her perspective on both of the plays in the fall semester and their directors. I know Kawamoto well and knew that she more than wanted to design *The Three Musketeers* but was less willing than myself to push until she got what she wanted. She and I developed a plan where she would speak to Borden about designing *The Three Musketeers* and get his approval whereupon we would speak to Veneziano rationally, explaining why each show would be best for us. I cannot say it was easy but Kawamoto and I were finally able to convince Veneziano that these shows would be the best possible projects showcasing each of our strengths and challenging our weaknesses. The three of us settled on Kawamoto designing *The Three Musketeers* and me designing *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. Looking back this foreshadows the design and production process for *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, as I will describe in Chapter Seven.

During our time in the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, Kawamoto and I have been asked to do more than other graduate students and we have also gone the extra mile for the department and several individuals. We thought we deserved this one. This is not to say that Veneziano did not have legitimate concerns about us taking the second and third shows. Would there be enough time to write the thesis? Would we be willing and able to handle two large shows back to back? She also attempted to use “real world experience” in defense for us to design the first two shows saying, “You don’t
always get to work with people you like on scripts that you like.” Though a true statement, we were unwilling to budge on this experience, which, in essence, was to showcase all we had learned over eight long years.
A talented, thorough, communicative production team is important to me when I begin any collaborative design process. The collaborative process is one that I value and cherish among fellow designers and the director. Without the collaborative element in the process a production is still possible but the product is often disjointed and incomplete. Thus, I was concerned about who the rest of the team would consist of. I thought the first person I should concern myself with was a technical director in order to ensure *Lady Windermere’s Fan* was perfectly constructed. I knew the person I wanted to work with was Christine Donaghy, a graduate technical director. Her attention to detail and need for perfection are attributes she and I share and I knew this show would be challenging and immensely rewarding for her. I find it important that the individuals one works with feel as though you want them there and that they bring something to the table that no one else can. Whether they love the project or not does not matter. Once the interest in the production has been set, they are committed and want to see the production succeed as much as I do.

My next concern was the costume designer. I was seriously worried that the set would look great and that the costumes would be bulky and awkward or clash with the set. The process to find out who would be designing was more difficult than I had anticipated. We were in production for a main stage show at the time (we are always in production for a main stage show) and the costume advisor, Janice Stauffer, had not found the time to speak to the graduate students and make any decisions about who would design which show. Mallory Prucha, a graduate costume designer, later informed
me that Stauffer had made costume assignments for the following season and Prucha would be designing *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. I was elated. Her attention to detail and ability to take on a show of this magnitude with confidence and fresh, well-developed ideas set my mind at ease.

The third member of the team was the lighting designer. I had hoped that the new lighting design graduate student, Clayton Van Winkle, would take on the challenge but I came to realize that he was more interested in *The Three Musketeers*. I respected his decision and found that Matt Baye, a fourth year undergraduate student, would be designing the lights. This is where my reservation and concern set in. I was fully aware of Baye’s strengths and weaknesses as a designer. Having watched him work on much smaller lighting designs in much smaller spaces, I felt he had overly complicated the execution of the design in an attempt to make it better. My reservations stemmed from my thinking this would either be Baye’s opportunity to prove that he had learned and grown from past designs, or prove his disorganization and overproducing of light. I did try to keep an open mind about working with Baye and what that would mean for the process and the product. I strategized about the best way to approach him and what I would be able to offer him scenically that would make the lights look the best they could. I also thought about what I would have to forfeit scenically for lighting in order to make this show as successful as was possible. I accepted all of what was about to come and felt I could handle anything through an open mind and thorough communication.

The last person we needed, and the one I was most interested in, was the properties master or mistress. I spoke to Veneziano about who she thought could handle a show this size. Not many names came to mind, as we do not have many individuals in
the department who are interested in properties. Alma Cerretta’s name was brought up. Cerretta, an undergraduate design student with an interest in properties and lighting, had been the properties mistress for main stage productions before and seemed like the best option for the scale of the show. This choice, though we had someone, did not bring me relief or comfort. I had worked with Cerretta several times before and discovered that time management and proactivity were not her strengths; both would prove immensely important during the process. I knew the undertaking with the show would be immense in terms of the scenic element. This would consist primarily of furniture and set decoration, which due to the period, would be difficult to find or construct. I was not sure that Cerretta was capable of taking on a show of this caliber. I put aside my good judgment and gave her the benefit of the doubt knowing there was no one else to even consider for the position.

Not long before the semester’s conclusion, Morgan Cooper, an undergraduate film major, asked Veneziano how he could become more involved in the design side of the department. She directed him to me, saying she thought he would make a great assistant designer. I had little experience working with Cooper but saw promise in his design abilities. I was excited to have an assistant but was not sure what exactly an assistant did and how I would best utilize his many talents. Not one to refuse assistance of any kind I decided to figure out Morgan’s role as the production progressed. This turned out to be one of the best decisions I made during this production.
Chapter Three: Initial Thoughts and Research

When this process began I had never read a play by Oscar Wilde. I only knew Wilde through his quotations and “one-liners.” When I first read Lady Windermere’s Fan I loved the script. I thought it offered great imagery and served the purpose of its existence well: to satirize the morals of Victorian society, particularly marriage. Once I had read the script for introductory purposes I re-read it to begin evaluating what was needed to serve the show visually. I read the set descriptions for each act and immediately became overwhelmed by what Wilde’s script called for on stage. It seemed that there was no room for the actors due to the amount of furniture, doors and detail. I also worried this could make the scene changes agonizingly long. I then remembered I was reading something that was based upon Victorian theatrical practice and aesthetic. This set my mind at ease. I was mentally able to throw out all of the descriptions of each act and base the layout and contents of the rooms solely on the stage directions within each act.

During the second reading I realized I did not have a working knowledge of the purpose of each room called for in the text, so I read the script looking only at plot and how that affected the spaces in which these characters lived. Wilde places the first act in Lady Windermere’s Morning Room where she is arranging flowers on a small table. Lady Windermere receives guests, one of whom is Lord Darlington, who professes his undying love for her. She also receives the Duchess of Berwick who reveals shocking news regarding her husband and another woman. Lord Windermere enters and the two quarrel about the information and Lady Windermere exits. For act two we move to the
drawing room of the Windermeres’ where a fancy party in honor of Lady Windermere’s twenty-first birthday is taking place. There are many attendees and much conversation is had about Lord and Lady Windermere and the mysterious woman, Mrs. Erlynne, who has come to the party against the wishes of the lady of the house. Lady Windermere, feeling embarrassed and unable to trust her husband, makes the decision to leave and exits for Lord Darlington’s flat leaving a note for her husband. When Mrs. Erlynne discovers the note, it is revealed that she is Lady Windermere’s mother. It is revealed that Mrs. Erlynne had taken the same actions as Lady Windermere and left her husband for another man when Lady Windermere was an infant. In act three it is late the same evening at Lord Darlington’s London flat where we find Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne engaging in conversation regarding the rumors about Lord Windermere and Lady Windermere leaving him. Lord Darlington, Lord Windermere and other bachelors arrive while the two women hide. The men drink and smoke cigars until the discovery of Lady Windermere’s fan sends the men into a frenzy. Lady Erlynne makes her presence known to the men while Lady Windermere escapes without being seen. Act four takes place the next afternoon and is set back in the morning room. The audience discovers Lady Windermere so distraught over the incident of the prior evening she is unwilling to take visitors. Lord Windermere enters and Lady Windermere apologizes for her accusations towards him. Mrs. Erlynne enters informing the Windermeres that she is to marry and is leaving London forever. All conflicts are resolved, ending the show with happiness and secrets for all.

Once I felt I had a firm understanding of the show’s plot and how the spaces helped to define the action, I researched the original function of the rooms. For instance,
as I am not a literalist in theatrical design I was interested in what a bachelor’s flat in 1890s London might feel like. In my research I found that Morning Rooms had east-facing exposure and were designed for daytime callers. They often had abstract designs and exotic motifs and were one of the only rooms exclusively given over to women. This also came with limitations and expectations from the lady of the house to have the ever-important curtains in her Morning Room. The drapes allowed for women to be masked from prying eyes and to add feminine frills and flounces. The Morning Room was not a private room in the strict sense, such as a bedroom, but was a privately public room where women organized household staff, spoke to servants, did correspondence and kept their accounts, all of which were morning tasks. In a broader sense, Victorian homes were both the private face of public life and the public face of private life.

Darlington’s rooms posed the largest challenge in regards to research. I found my search for images difficult to put into words. Lord Darlington resides in a flat in London that is much smaller than the Windermeres’ home but is still large for today’s standards. I thought Patterson would have an idea of how Darlington’s home would have been laid out so I spoke to her. The small amount of images I was able to procure was reinforced by her ideas about his spaces. She informed me that Darlington would have had an entire floor of a London townhouse. He would have a full house staff and several rooms but on a much smaller scale than the
Windermeres’. What I concluded was that Darlington’s rooms were similar enough to the Windermeres’ that I need not concern myself with the specifics of this bachelor’s home in regards to aesthetic but should focus on how Lord Darlington’s rooms would differ from those of the Windermeres. I knew the masculinity of Lord Darlington needed to be translated to the furnishings and layout as well as the overall feel of his space.

Act two takes place in the drawing room of the Windermere’s home with a large main entrance to the room, halls to balconies, a ballroom and a supper room. After the first reading of the script I knew the hall to the supper room was not necessary, as it is only referenced once and could be omitted. The balconies, ballroom and large entrance, however, were quite important to the action described in the text. I was puzzled as to how a drawing room could have so many rooms connected and still function as a space for entertaining. Through further research I discovered that Victorian drawing rooms were the smartest looking rooms and were the primary space in the home where visitors could be entertained. They were often large rooms, thus allowing for many adjoining rooms and multiple seating areas. The images I found were most informative in regards to the decoration and layout of drawing rooms. One quality about drawing rooms that remained consistent was the amount of décor and furnishings...
overcrowding them. Often because they were the primary space for entertaining, they contained all of the interesting and nicest furniture pieces and bric-a-brac a Victorian could put in the room. However, if the décor was not oppressively crowded and visually assaulting, the room was smartly decorated with matching furniture from earlier decades, specifically the Rococo and Regency periods. In either case, this was the part of the house in which Victorians invested the most money and time the presentation of the room so that they would look all the better to the visiting outside world.

I continued to research Victorian interiors. It was during this research that I discovered Judith and Martin Miller’s book, *Victorian Style* and *The Antiques Book of Victorian Interiors* compiled by Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett. Both books proved to be valuable resources in their own ways. Miller’s book is not only divided into separate living spaces within the home, but also details the architectural style, colors, furnishings and fabrics of the period in the form of explicitly descriptive text and full color image. The sections regarding furnishings proved to be the most useful. Not only are the furnishings in rooms clearly displayed, but also shown are the corresponding pieces and when they would have been produced. Garrett’s book was equally useful and contained images of period rooms ranging in style from a modest cottage to the Biltmore estate, which is the largest privately owned home in America. The color images clarified wallpaper and carpet patterns as well as color motifs of the period. This book provided the link I had been seeking between the hazed museum-like black and white images to the rich, lively color-filled rooms of the Victorian era.
Chapter Four: Research

I was extraordinarily curious about all things associated with this play. The research portion of the design process is the most exciting as it allows me a glimpse inside the lives of those who lived long ago. It seemed that once I started the research for the show it never ceased. Even into the final weeks of the production process I was researching for the sake of clarification and specificity in furnishings. As I began my research, I felt I could not further my understanding of the many elements of the play if I did not first understand Wilde’s motivations and views of the world in which he lived.

Cooper offered me a copy of the script he had acquired from the library. It contained a forward by George L. Hersey that proved invaluable to myself and Cooper. Though Hersey has strong opinions about exactly how each room should be laid out and decorated, all of the content was carefully considered and thoroughly researched. He also includes a lengthy chapter on Wilde and why he staged each act in the location he did. Hersey offers explanations for why the Windermere live at Carlton House Terrace and how that would have simultaneously appealed to and shocked the audience of the day. Hersey states:

How necessary for his play was the realism of the new stage. As the curtain rises on the ‘morning-room’ of Act One the audience must see, not the stylized commonplaces of the typical ‘room in Lord _________’s house’ which had been so familiar to the previous century, but a highly individualized and minutely studied late Victorian parlor. (Hersey 75)

He discusses the original design of Carlton House Terrace and how that would
dictate the look of the rooms. However, Lady Windermere would fight against the dated décor and:

The late Victorian tastes she shared with the social leaders of the generation would call for highly patterned wall-paper and masses of draperies at the windows. The morning room, in keeping with its feminine purposes, might well have been furnished in the style reminiscent of the rococo [sic] reign of Louis XV, but translated into heavier, more ‘Victorian’ forms. (Hersey 76)

I appreciated Hersey’s researched perspectives on the rooms but knew this was not the specific direction we were to take the design. His opinions about the design were heavy handed and did not fit with the light, quick, movement filled production Patterson and I had envisioned.

This information led to research about Carlton House Terrace. The designer John Nash constructed the white stucco-faced building in the 1830s. The nine large houses are located in the city of Westminster in London and overlook St. James Park. Considered the most fashionable residential addresses in London, only the most wealthy and powerful could afford the mansions. We
found several websites that offered great insight into the building and its current uses, one of which is private residences. Cooper found Nicholas Cooper’s book *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design*. He showed me the first image of the interior of Carlton House Terrace. Though only the stair hall, we were able to see the magnitude and opulence of these great homes. This led to further discoveries about the layout of the houses and which rooms were on each floor and why. We found that the dining room, library and billiard room for the men dominated the first floor. The second was reserved for studies, parlors and drawing rooms. Finally, the third and fourth floors consisted of bedrooms, bathrooms and dressing rooms. This helped us understand where the rooms the Windermeres occupied in the script would have been in the home and what we would have seen outside of the windows.

Cooper and I began researching the architectural features of homes of the Victorian period. At the beginning of this research I knew we were not going to reproduce the windows and mouldings of the era on stage but were gathering the images to gain a better understanding of the weight and amount of ornamentation on the architectural features. We found Roger W. Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler’s book, *Victorian Interior Decoration, American Interiors 1830-1900*, to be extraordinarily useful. This book was a wealth of knowledge on the era. It was also well organized into ten to twenty year blocks. These blocks of time, though all Victorian, were distinctly different in regards to the style and ornamental details. The other book that became our “bible” was Dover Publishing Company’s newest edition of *Victorian Architectural Details*. This book was originally published by A.J. Bicknell & Co. in 1873 and is an unabridged republication with a slight reduction of the plates. It is filled with a plethora
of designs for stairs, mantels, doors, windows, cornices, porches, and other decorative elements, all of which are in scale. This proved to be the most valuable print for Cooper and myself when it came to drafting the fireplace unit and all of the intricate moulding for the show.

The furnishings of the spaces became my next point of interest for research. I needed to confirm that my initial thoughts about the furnishings were accurate to the time. I discovered I was correct in my thinking. The era was dominated by wood edged furniture with heavy tufting. Wood furnishings often had cabriole legs and a detailed, intricately carved panel and backs. With a working knowledge of the furniture stock of the school, I thought how I could incorporate existing pieces into the necessary furnishings. I knew we had an English Roundabout Seat but was unsure if it was truly Victorian or if it was from an earlier period. Our research proved its accuracy and we made plans to incorporate the piece in the design. One concern I had was that Lord Darlington’s rooms would appear feminine due to the period ornamentation on the furnishings. We were able to find masculine looking pieces with sharper lines and rougher upholstery that were still visually warm and would fit into the spaces of the equally warm character. Lady Windermere’s settee was a concern that I had from the beginning of the process. I knew that Howell had its limitations and could
not accommodate large furnishings. Many of the settees we found were large, curved pieces with oversized, space consuming backs. I thought we may need to build the settee for Lady Windermere’s morning room but was unable to find a piece the shop was capable of constructing. I thought this would become one of the pieces we would leave open to interpretation. I did not want wicker in the space and neither did Patterson. We had talked about our mutual hatred for wicker early in the process. However, she and I both understood the need for this piece to be as open and visually light as possible as to not weigh down the space visually. When Cooper and I felt we had a grasp on the look of the furnishings we directed our attention to the clothing of the time.

A piece of history that I found relevant to the production was that all Victorians knew, even if only subliminally, that dress reflected not only what they did but also who they were. Though not my area of expertise, I consider the clothing extremely important in relation to the set. I have not done my job if the actors are unable to move around the stage with ease due to poor layout or too small of a space. I needed to know how large the dresses were to be, especially in terms of act two at the large birthday celebration. I knew Patterson and Prucha were to change the period slightly to ensure the ladies sleeves were not too large and obstructing on to the faces of the actors. In regards to furniture placement and space needed between pieced I needed to know if the ladies’ dresses were to have trains and how long they might be. What I discovered was that the dresses were more than likely going to have trains that varied in length. The overall skirt size was not as full as I expected and was trumpet shaped, hugging the body slightly from the waist to knee where a larger flare began and went to the floor.
I felt I had a working knowledge of many aspects of Victorian life and culture based upon the research we had gathered. I understood that I had gotten an overview and that more research was needed. Wielding this information, however, I felt prepared to begin discussions with the director.
Chapter Five: Discussions with the Director

My first meeting with Patterson took place long before the spring semester ended. The show was not to open until November. Our meeting was not long but Patterson did have several specifics about the show that she wanted me to keep in mind as I designed. The first was that above all this show is a comedy. Though Wilde wrote this play over one hundred years ago she wanted to keep the humorous commentary on society intact. She also wanted to see movement in the set. It was at this time she made a fluid like gesture involving her arms and hands. Though confused at the time I eventually came to understand the point at which she was trying to get.

Patterson wanted to see the idea of the fan somewhere in the set. Whether that meant literally as in a backdrop, or something physically fan shaped, or if it was broad and merely suggestive, she wanted the fan to always be on stage. She explained her liking of fans in regards to the way one is able to hide secrets and, in turn, reveal some of what and who we are but only to those whom we choose. Once the larger ideas of the play and the design had been discussed she paused a moment and said, “I’m going to say something and I don’t want you to think this isn’t up for discussion.” I responded with a curious, “Alright” at which point she informed me that in her mind, she had always seen the show in black and white. “Because,” she proclaimed, “Lady Windermere only sees the world as good and bad, right and wrong, black and white.” She did clarify that she did not mean black and white as in “classic movie” with shades of gray. There was to be no gray. Patterson needed more time to think about this and, of course, talk to Prucha, the costume designer, to see if this was feasible. My reaction to her idea was not what
she was expecting, assuming that I would have huge reservations and later tell her that it would not work for me. I informed her that in my readings of the script I too had seen the show in black and white. My version was more of the “classic movie” feeling, but still, black and white of some form. I left the meeting excited and hopeful that Patterson and I were headed down the same long and scary path on this exciting journey. Within the week Patterson informed me that she and Prucha had talked and we were, in fact, going with black and white; pure black and pure white, no gray.

My research had produced a great many images and I was having difficulty sorting through the lot. Some of the images represented the production as a whole, while others were individual furniture pieces. I gave the large stack of images to Patterson to review. I made sure to leave off any and all notes I had made to see if she and I were thinking in the same way. It took time for her to review the images, but once I received the noted images I knew I held a better understanding of what she thought the show and the time period would look like. The first image Patterson noted was a parlor opening with heavy carved wood molding and full, long drapes. I knew this one image would
help set the tone for the show. Not only is the image quintessential Victorian ornamentation, it has visual presence but is still open and soft.

It was at this time that Patterson gave all of the designers a thorough breakdown of the play explaining what she saw for each of the locations and characters. Her objective for this document was to begin the discussion about the play in every aspect. From the first paragraph I knew these pages would offer a great deal of information that I was seeking and some I did not know I wanted. Patterson used the word ‘wit’ as her jumping off point for a long list of adjectives she wanted to see the production represent. As a designer I constantly vacillate between loving and hating the use of adjectives when discussing design. Ming Cho Lee once said that adjectives are of no use to him because “I don’t think you can draw adjectives” (Ebrahimian 95). My objection to descriptors is that any given word can have different meanings to different people. What I see as crisp and clean may be cold and sharp to someone else. Due to this variation in interpretation, I always have reservations about lists of adjectives. I read what Patterson offered and took what I thought was the essence of the script to her and we talked about it. I posed questions about certain phrasing she used that I did not understand. I then sought clarification on things ensuring that she and I were like-minded in our visions for the production; specifically, the crisp, neat look of Lady Windermere’s spaces and the warm and dark spaces of Lord Darlington.

The system, no matter my feelings about it, worked. Patterson, Prucha, Cooper, and I were able to open our lines of communication so no question was off limits. If any of us needed clarification we knew we could approach each other and there would be an open discussion. At times I felt as though I was bombarding Patterson with useless
questions that were too detailed for a director to worry about. Yet, she was always open and willing to discuss anything that I wanted to talk about. In the event that she did not have time at the moment she and I would set a time in the near future to talk. When we felt like we had a grasp on the production our communications slimmed. Cooper and I were often busy upholstering, painting, or shopping, not allowing us the opportunity to speak regularly. By this time we all knew what we were striving for and thought more discussion would only waste valuable time.
Chapter Six: Model

Long before I spoke to Patterson about the play and what she had in mind I had ideas and images swirling in my head. There were times when I would sketch them quickly, but nothing more than a single set piece ever manifested. I thought the best thing to do, once I had done some research, was to build a model. I am a visual person who works best with three-dimensional space, even when it is scaled down. I also know that Howell Theatre has terrible sight lines so before making the model I laid tracing paper over the ground plan of Howell Theatre to work out the sight line problems. This was much easier said than done. I went through many drafts of the line set schedule with the total count ranging from three to eight sets of legs and borders. I finally settled on four sets of drapes that I thought would create enough depth within the stage space. They also allowed for scenery and furniture to move on and off stage easily while leaving enough room for lights between the legs.

It was at this time that I became aware of how narrow and shallow Howell stage is and the potential problems that would pose. Its narrow nature did not allow us to create any stage pictures that looked at all pastoral. Any ideas about large rectangular drops or sweeping wide rooms were impossible. This was only further complicated by the designed legs, which made the space even narrower. The shallowness of Howell is challenging due to the terrible acoustical quality of the space. Thus, one cannot stage actors upstage of a certain point or they will not be heard. This dead sound space directly affects what a designer can consciously design upstage. With that, the overall depth of the stage is limited. In turn, designers then face the challenge of the apron. Howell
stage’s apron is large in relation to the space upstage of the proscenium arch.
Patterson had mentioned wanting the show to be presentational in nature. She did not want the audience to feel they needed to relate to these characters but rather observe them. She and I both viewed this in terms of a window that the audience was looking through. As a designer for the theatre I became aware of the proscenium arch acting as a picture frame early on in my design career. I had wanted to utilize the arch to establish the idea of the window, but was unable to do so due to the size of the apron. I had wanted a grand drape of sorts but knew it would cause problems as all of the action would then take place too far from the front edge of the stage. These staging difficulties forced me to move to the model and to consider the logistics of the set.

I started by building a one-half inch model of Howell Theatre that included the full wing space. The intention was to build something that I could play with. I could evaluate scenic elements in terms of rolling on and off and flying in and out so as to fully comprehend exactly how much space was available and thus understand the feasibility of certain set pieces. While modeling the theatre I began thinking about the specifics that I wanted to see based upon the stage limitations. As it turned out, the list of specifics was anything but specific. I had too many ideas. The list included rolling and spinning door and window units that could connect to create a different scenic space, windows and doors that would fly in and out, rugs, a Broadway style raised deck¹ that would allow for scenery to move on and off stage without seeing the stage crew, stylized legs and borders, window drapes, cut-out and or translucent drops, feathers, a grand drape, columns, fluted

¹ A stage floor that has been built-up with platforms that includes a track system by which scenery is moved. The casters of the scenery fit between the gaps in the Platforming and rest on the stage floor. Often used for large Broadway musicals in order to allow scenery to move without the audience witnessing the stage crew.
molding, and plant tables with flowers. I had too many ideas and was not able to sort through what was absolutely necessary for the show when I began designing.

I added two logistical elements that I felt needed to be considered; places for lights as well as scenic and furniture placement that allowed for a figure eight traffic pattern in each act.

With the list on paper, I moved forward with the model. I was excited about building a huge model in half-inch scale so I could play with the set pieces and furniture. From the first time I thought about *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, I knew the show had to have designed legs and borders. In talking with Patterson about her initial thought about the show being light and quick, I decided designed legs and borders would be a good way to incorporate the often ugly but necessary stage blacks into the scenery. For this reason, I did not hesitate to design the legs and borders in the model. I referenced what drapes of the time looked like and attempted to recreate the feel of them on a larger scale. I knew the budget did not allow for us to purchase fabric for the drapes. I designed them knowing that we would use our stock legs and borders. In order for them to not look flat and boxy we would tie them back with black and white rope that would end, on the legs, with an oversized set of dangling tassels.

The next step was to move on to scenery. I had known that I was not interested in practical walls for the set. I thought this would visually weigh the stage down. The solution I came up with was units. They would be freestanding units that were windows and doors. The
idea was that they would be attached to the fly rail for swift ease during scene changes. I constructed two window units and two door units for the model. Upon placing them in line with the fly rail I instantly realized that the set looked flat and boring. This was not something I could live with. This was the determining factor for the units to roll. I was still convinced, even though I had not properly thought it out, that the units could move by themselves as long as we had a raised deck for them to travel on. The raised Broadway style deck was an element of the design that I was willing to reconsider, but I thought I would design for it and, if need be, could eliminate. The motivation behind the deck or was that it allowed for scenery to move without seeing people off stage moving the pieces. The decision about the deck helped to inform the type of scenery we could create. I knew the deck could not act like a stage revolve in which the scenery is attached to a large circular platform that spins, which allows sets and locations to change quickly and effortlessly.

I re-read each act and tried to get the scenic elements and furniture down to the minimum of what was referred to in the script, while still attempting to keep the design aesthetic of the production intact. I knew that an entrance, a fireplace, and a set of windows were the key scenic pieces in the Morning Room. In regards to furniture, Lady Windermere’s settee, chair, writing desk, and tea table were needed but I was not sure, due to the lack of activity in the scene, that much else was necessary. I set out to arrange act one, and I failed time after time. I found myself moving the scenery and furniture in as many configurations as I could, just to see what things looked like. This was acceptable for a period of time, but when this continued I grew worried that this idea would not work at all. I finally made an arrangement that I found dynamic and that
allowed for enough downstage play space that the audience would not feel as though the actors were miles away from them. I felt better knowing that the scenic elements were locked, to some degree, and that the furniture placement was the primary focus, which could be easily adjusted for the needs of the action within the act. During my deliberations about the first act I kept in mind the final act where we return to Lady Windermere’s Morning Room, I knew that if I could arrange all of the elements effectively, act four would work within the same parameters.

At this point in the process the university had spring break and I went to New York City with Kawamoto. I was excited about the prospect of being inspired by all of the amazing things that New York City is, but I was not able to find the inspiration that I sought. I was able to find a fabric store in the garment district that seemed promising. It is located in New York City so I assumed it would have a much larger selection than all of the fabric stores in Lincoln combined. I had an irrationally romantic idea that I would come across an assortment of black and white fabric and I would become inspired and suddenly see the show in my head, act by act, and I would be forced to purchase fabric for upholstery, drapery and costumes. The show would “come to me” inside THIS fabric
store. I could not have been more wrong. Once I entered, I knew this experience was not going to be what I had anticipated. But I was still hopeful. I began wandering the tightly stuffed aisles afraid to touch anything for fear of a fabric avalanche. I passed rack after rack as I wandered through the seemingly never-ending maze to all of the smallest corners of the shop. Once in a while I would come across a fabric that I thought could work. There were brocades, silks, sheers, and velvets, but upon further evaluation, I would discover there were only four yards of fabric and I had no idea what I would do with it once it had been purchased. I took some swatches here and there as I worked my way through the shop. I finally ended up where I started, not having furthered the design process for the show any more than when I had walked in the door. With my romantic fantasy unfulfilled I spent the remainder of the trip not expecting to be inspired. This all changed one rainy New York day, when Kawamoto and I visited The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As we strolled through the museum, loving the visual feast surrounding us, we came upon a room that had another room inside of it. My curiosity was piqued. I love architectural installation pieces. It turned out to be a period style room in which everything was white. Immediately my heart raced and I became elated. I was able to see a fully dressed room that was all white with no other color anywhere. I frantically moved from window to window peering in to
get the best look at all of the intricate white details of the space. This room in the museum led to another installation that was relevant to the show. Starting large and progressively getting smaller were walls, some doors, some windows, some paneled walls; all painted white. The greatest thing about the piece were the details and molding on each wall. Though not highly intricate, they offered enough of a suggestion of detail that the walls suggested the Rococo period. I feverishly snapped photos with every intention of showing Patterson. When we had returned I presented the images to Patterson and she loved them and thought the overall feel was exactly what she had envisioned.

Upon my return to school I knew that I needed to approach this production logically with an open mind and ultimately move closer to having the show designed by the time school ended for the summer. *Lady Windermere’s Fan* was the only thing I wanted to be working on. I continued to play with the model every opportunity I had. I constantly attempted to work out the challenges in place for act two, the fancy party. I would occasionally stop by Patterson’s office and accost her with questions and through this I discovered what she was thinking visually for this fancy party. The first and most important was that we needed to establish a main entrance into the room that was prominent enough to pull focus from the hoards of people on stage. Next, Patterson expressed her excitement about seeing only a glimpse of the ballroom from the drawing.
room and, on occasion, we would see people dancing by. Finally, we needed a door or some form of a third entrance to the room that implied an outdoor terrace not far away. Having heard Patterson’s thoughts on the visuals for the act, I looked at all of the scenic elements as equally important. Keeping in mind the narrow and shallow nature of Howell, I sketched and arranged the scenic elements in the model, attempting to solidify the act. It seemed that every time I was able to design something I was happy with, it would not fit on Howell stage or did not offer an adequate amount of acting space.

I built stair platforms that would roll on to give the main entrance more significance, but they always looked odd and out of place. Feeling defeated and that I was wasting time, I began sketching solely on paper, mainly because it was faster and if I did not like something I could just get another piece of paper. The initial sketches were either too simplistic and did not fit with the grandeur of the home or the show, or they were too large and did not fit with the productions’ simplistic and clean sensibilities. In one sketch I designed a large staircase with two levels that would function as the main entrance to the room and as access to the terrace.

Once I had finished the drawing I showed it to Patterson and she approved it. I was ecstatic. I had been thinking about a
large unit upstage since the beginning of the production and loved seeing it on paper. However, after further thought on the matter I realized this unit went against everything that Patterson and I had wanted for the scene, which was action all over the stage due to the number of people and the differentiation of the spaces through the doors. I talked to my assistant, Morgan Cooper, about why I liked the drawing and why it would not work for the act. He agreed and we went back to the drawing board. The one good thing that came from that sketch was the revelation that we needed an upstage platform in the act. I had known from the beginning that the backdrop for act two would be the star drop\(^2\) we had in stock. I also knew that the platform could not be too tall as to block the drop. I felt like I was wasting too much time fighting with this scene. I made the decision to abandon it and come back to it after I had officially figured out act one and it was approved by the director.

\(^2\) Star Drops are LED curtain or fiber optic curtains with LEDs in either a grid or randomly aligned pattern to create the effect of the star filled night sky.
Chapter Seven: Design Process

During the summer I knew I would not be able to devote much time to Lady Windermere’s Fan. I also knew that I would not be able to get the show completely out of my head. I had large design commitments during the summer and knew the rest of the production team would not have time to work on Lady Windermere’s Fan either, including the director. My plan was to devote the month of August to the show and have as much planned out as possible when school started in late August. Things do not always go as planned. I had a lot of trouble focusing on the show and finding the necessary inspiration to complete the design. I became frustrated at myself for not being able to put anything together. I also began reevaluating act one and second-guessing the placement of all set pieces and the overall aesthetic of the act. After several failed attempts at sketches that were either too simplistic or too busy and expensive, I sent Patterson a scattered email explaining where I was in the process. The main concern I expressed was that I did not want the show to be about the scene changes, but rather about the scenes within the settings. She responded, letting me know that she understood what I meant and that she would be back in town later that week for us to talk. I thought I desperately needed her opinions on what I had put together and where I was headed. Her excitement for the show was palpable, which always helped me find the joy in the project and what I was producing.

Once the director and I had met and discussed where we were and where we were going, I found the process slightly easier. I still struggled with finding the essence of each act and translating that visually. It did not seem to matter how many times I read
the script or made lists of only what was called for, I still could not figure out the basic layout of the acts. Cooper assisted me with everything. I came to realize, later in the production, that the show would not have reached completion if not for him. He always offered well thought out insight into the script. He looked at things in a way I could not see and he let me know that what I had already worked out did serve the show and was visually appealing. Considering the problems we were encountering, Cooper and I continued sketching and talking about the play as well as researching the specifics of the script.

I decided I needed more inspiration so I asked the costume shop supervisor about borrowing a fan. They were more than helpful and offered me more than one style of fan to work with. I found the black lace fan to be the most useful. I loved the intricacies and curves of the open lacework. I attempted to use the detailing as inspiration for the layout of the spaces. However, the detailing was far too small and did not translate effectively on stage. However, the fan inspired the black outline that became the grand drape or act drop. This became one of the only designed pieces of the show that was solidified.

Our first production meeting took place on August 25, 2011, and Cooper and I were less than prepared for what was in store. Of all of the production meetings to come,
this was the easiest. The faculty understood where we were in the process and the challenges that come from attempting to design during the summer. The one problem I did have was that Baye, the lighting designer, had not realized that act one and four took place in the same room in the Windermere’s home. After explaining this to him he reassured me he was going to read the script again. I instantly became fearful of what the lighting was to become. It was during this meeting that Patterson offered a reference for the way in which she saw the production. She told us of her frequent summer visits to The Art Institute of Chicago, specifically the miniatures in the basement. Two years prior I had seen the miniatures for the first time. I was fascinated by their intricate details. Everything from the fringe on the drapes to the sheet music on the music stands was perfectly placed in the tiny period rooms. This led Patterson to speak about her wanting the show to have movement, be delicate looking, and to be light and quick. She also referenced pen and ink drawings for a possible aesthetic of the show. I carefully considered all she had said in relation to how I saw the show and what we had already discussed and finalized.

After the meeting I thought about the production and all that was ahead of us. I was concerned about our lack of preparedness and my trouble finding my rhythm in school. I looked to the meeting to offer a spark of inspiration for us that could get us on the path of finalizing the design for this show. I felt as if I had been living with the production for too long which involved too many thoughts and ideas that I could not sort through. Serving the script and the play remained my first objective. I was fearful of putting anything on stage that was unnecessary or that Patterson would potentially not use. This is no comment on her, but if I offered her something that she did not use I
would blame myself. My fears were steeped in insecurities about my designing ability and whether or not this profession was right for me. I still do not know if the challenge this posed was good for me personally, but either way, it did not help the show’s design reach completion in a timely manner.

Cooper and I soon had a working ground plan for acts one and four but still struggled with acts two and three. Patterson made slight adjustments to furniture placement in act one and we were able to finalize the layout of the act. The week following the first production meeting consisted of me, Cooper and Patterson looking at different layouts for act two and three on Howell stage and with the model. The three of us had decided the rolling units would be the best solution for the primary scenic elements. They were visually light and they could be manipulated in nearly any configuration, leaving many options open for each act. In the beginning Patterson had wanted the set, whatever it was to become, to be predominantly white on one side for Lady Windermere’s rooms and predominantly black on the other for Lord Darlington’s rooms. The units also solved this problem as well.

Act one consisted of five of the units in a V shape to create a corner style set. Three window units were aligned to create the illusion of a wall of windows overlooking St. James Park. The adjacent units were a set of double doors and a fireplace. Downstage right of the fireplace stood a small writing desk and chair. Downstage center in the room, a curved and airy settee and side table anchored the space with an armed upholstered chair to their right. An upholstered bench sat in front of the fireplace. Behind the scenic units sat a two-dimensional cutout of treetops that represented St. James Park in London. We spoke to Baye and his advisor, Laurel Shoemaker, about the
necessity of the aesthetic choice and functionality of the cutout. It would hide the lighting necessary to illuminate the cyclorama, which was upstage of the St. James Park cutout. They were understanding and requested a black scrim\textsuperscript{3} downstage of the cutout to diffuse light. We agreed that this would not only assist lighting, but also would slightly soften and haze the image, making it look better. 

Act two, with all of its people and specific requirements, was still a challenge but one for which Cooper and I had an idea. I made a quick sketch that offered a glimpse of what the act would later become. The sketch consisted of two door and window units on an upstage platform with a large doorway to their right. Downstage of the doors were three large connected arches that were supported by columns and stairs leading down to the main playing space. In this instance the door to the ballroom would be one of the exits offstage between two sets of stage legs. We showed this to Patterson who liked the idea of the look but did not like how the main entrance was situated so closely to the windows, thus not pulling the necessary focus. Cooper and I assessed how this could be simplified to create a layout that matched the clean look of acts one and four. We immediately eliminated the arches and columns, as they served no other purpose than decoration. I had always thought the main entrance to the room would be

\textsuperscript{3} A transparent fabric used as a drop in the theater to create special effects of lights or atmosphere.
elevated. It was at this time that I realized this was not possible. We, instead, kept the upstage platform that lead out to the terrace as it did in the sketch. Thus, we placed the main entrance on the stage floor. What was settled upon was the main entrance was to be further downstage. It could pull focus while the door to the ballroom remained upstage, tucked away. The window units that were to be used in act one would move upstage to become the terrace doors for act two. They would fit between the stationary upstage platform and a long stair unit that would roll on from the wing. This meant the bottom opening of the windows would become the floor of the terrace doors. Cooper and I had to not only consider the logistics of this, but also ensure the paneling under the act one windows was not out of proportion to the rest of the unit.

We knew the only furniture needed for act two were places for the masses of people to sit. We did, however, forget about the end of the act where Lady Windermere writes the letter to her husband. Later during the rehearsal process Patterson approached us asking for a solution and apologized for not having realized we had not addressed that important piece of stage business. I could not believe we had missed the need for a desk and chair of sorts. Even in our thoroughness of readings and lists, we were still able to miss a significant piece to the act. We addressed the oversight as unobtrusively as possible by placing a small desk and chair near the downstage leg. This was the best
solution, considering the two downstage poofs and the upstage roundabout seat. The remainder of open space was needed to allow for appropriate blocking patterns of the actors. Two matching crystal chandeliers would top the act.

Often, due to my insecurities as a designer, I would seek Patterson to approve most of the choices Cooper and I made. As we would solidify anything within an act, I would immediately take it to Patterson seeking her approval on layout and furniture placement. I did, at times, feel we were pester her with decisions she did not need to make. I vacillated between feeling like a complete nuisance and not wanting to be a steamroller designer who sought no approval from anyone.

With the first day of construction fast approaching, Cooper and I spent many late nights in front of computers, drafting out the ground plans and elevations for Donaghy, the technical director. She and I had been in constant communication about where Cooper and I were in the process. She grew worried that she would not have adequate time to turn our designer drafting into the necessary construction drawings. With the best-laid plans always come problems. Cooper and I discovered, when we began to build elements in AutoCAD, that the model and paper ground plan we had been using were not as accurate as we had thought. It seemed we had less space than we had anticipated. We set out to make a full and complete line set schedule, which included lights, scenery, drapery, and sound equipment that was to be flown or hung in the air. As we began to put these plans on paper they did not fit together logistically. We moved them up and down stage several times in an attempt to make everything fit. This was a complicated problem due the number of items on line sets that could not change positions. Between the three fixed electrics lines, legs and borders needed for sightlines, flying scenic
elements, chandeliers, and the upstage star drop, we were limited on what was available. All of these logistical problems pushed back my and Cooper’s time to complete the elevations of the units. Once we were able to compromise and finalize the line set schedule, and subsequently, the ground plans, we moved to elevating the units.

During the nearly two weeks Cooper and I spent drafting the ground plans and elevations for the show, Donaghy and her crew had begun construction. She grew frustrated that we had not turned in a full and complete packet with the entire scenic design laid out. This packet would have allowed her the opportunity to budget money, time, people, space, and resources effectively. We were only giving her pieces at a time, thus she was not able to get the full scope of the task at hand. She did what she could and built the rolling platforms for the units first. Within a day and a half this task was completed and she needed more. This cycle perpetuated for, what seemed to be, the remainder of the construction process. Cooper and I were aware of the problems this caused Donaghy and the production, and attempted to complete the drawings as quickly as possible.

The technical direction advisor, Ed Stauffer, informed Donaghy that he wanted to begin construction of the arches. She had planned to construct them in an assembly line fashion by completing one step at a time on all of the units. Stauffer wanted to make a prototype to ensure the design was buildable. He took the first drafting Cooper and I had given Donaghy and began building. This drafting was not clear and, in places, contained inaccurate measurements. That weekend Cooper and I went into the shop to look at the arch to make final decisions about molding. Upon evaluating the arch we discovered two large differences in the construction than what we had drafted. The first was that the
width of the side structures was larger than we had drawn. Stauffer had not taken into account the width of the wood when cutting. This would affect the look of the molding later. Secondly, the overall height of the arch was eighteen inches too short. Stauffer was attempting to teach me a lesson about due dates and turning in clear paperwork on time. While I respected his passive attempt at instructing, I found Stauffer’s disregard for what we were trying to create despicable. It was too late to fix the problem with the size of the side structures of the arches. However, Donaghy was able to add vertical structure to the base of the arch to bring it to its designed height.

As the first rehearsal drew near, Patterson desired a ground plan for act three. I had obsessed over the layout long enough and felt I needed to finalize something whether I liked it or not. I had become frustrated enough with the initial process that I was content with whatever I put on stage. I quickly threw an arrangement together with the model and showed Patterson.

We were headed into a production meeting and did not have a great deal of time. She looked at the layout and paused to think for a moment. She finally said, “Yes, this will work quite well.” The only piece that did not work for her was a sofa that she thought would be better as a chaise lounge. I agreed and I cut the back off of the model sofa. The show was finally completely designed. Surprisingly, this production meeting went well for the first time in the entire process. Every prior meeting
was filled with questions about if we wanted the show to be black and white, comments about not having enough money, talk of the impossibility of constructing what we had designed, and suggestions about how the show should be designed from everyone who was not the scenic design advisor. Patterson, Cooper, and I tried to keep our cool as best we could. Often after the meetings the three of us would talk about how the process was going and how counterproductive the production meetings were. Not only did Patterson want the production to succeed she wanted the student designers to have the chance to design. This was not possible with the format of the meetings and the personality types who attended.

After the meeting, having finalized the units, I discovered act three had become the most crowded of the acts with a bar table, desk and chair, chaise lounge, and poker table with three chairs. The perimeter of the room consisted of a fireplace and two opposite entrances, flanking a set of heavily draped double windows. Behind the windows was the black scrim, backed by a two-dimensional cutout of a London townhouse rooftop. Beyond the rooftop cutout was the twinkling star drop. Not only did furniture fill the room more than the other three acts, it appeared darker due to the units and furniture being predominantly black in color.
Cooper and I continued working painstakingly on the elevations for the units, constantly struggling with the details and molding. From the beginning I knew the scenic units would not be direct reproductions of early 20th century molding. I did, however, want them to have the feel of the ornamentation while still fitting within the aesthetic of the production. Even with the amount of reference images I had accumulated I was unable to see the essence of the trim work. Cooper’s eye for design assisted in simplifying the original molding for our purposes. We were able to create Lady Windermere’s molding from small, thin layers of wood painted alternately in black and white. I had thought this may look too busy and distracting, but to my surprise it was perfectly simple yet elegant. Lord Darlington’s molding proved an even greater challenge. Patterson stressed that Darlington’s side of the units had to be more masculine and less curved. Though impossible to make a curved structure square, we were able to visually square the doors and molding. We achieved this by adding horizontal detail to the door at the beginning of the arched top. We also added triangular detailing for the side structure.

Now that all of the scenic elements had been addressed we turned our focus to properties and furniture. Knowing full well that Cerretta was not experienced enough to fully take charge of a show of this magnitude, I turned my attention toward the
specialized furniture for the production. Cooper and I looked through the furniture storage in the building for anything that we could use or make-work. We were not able to use much of what we had in stock due to the black and white nature of the show.

The furnishings required for act one, though simple, were extremely specific due to the layout of the act and the period constraints we were working in. Also, late Victorian and early Edwardian furnishings are not easy to find in Lincoln, Nebraska. We were able to pull the fireplace bench, side table, desk chair, and upholstered side chair with arms from stock. All four pieces needed to be painted black and white, and the bench and side chair needed to be reupholstered to match our hyper limited color scheme. I had known going into this project that we would have to build the settee in order to get the exact specifications we were seeking. We were able to pull a lace back patterned, full-sized headboard from stock to use as the back of the settee and two short cabriole legs to use as the front legs. Scrap lumber was used for the seat, arms and apron\(^4\) of the settee. We routed and sanded the edges of the arms and apron to create a soft curved design. Once painted black, I padded and upholstered the seat, finishing it with a rope trim around the edge.

Act two furnishings consisted of two pouffes of different sizes, a roundabout chair, a small side table and chair. Veneziano provided the small table, and the remainder was pulled from stock. The side table and chair were painted white, with the chair

---

4 A wooden panel that connects the surface and legs of a table or chair. It is placed at right angles to the underside of a tabletop or seat of a chair, and extends between the top of the legs. Aprons are also used on bottoms of cabinets and chests. An apron can provide a decorative touch to an otherwise unadorned piece of furniture and at the same time provide structural support and strength. They can be carved or pierced and quite elaborate depending on when the furniture was made. Sometimes the apron can be so pronounced that taking it away would completely change the look of a piece.
receiving black-monogramed satin seat upholstery, trimmed with white chord. We reupholstered the two poofs in white brocade and trimmed them with black fringe. The roundabout chair was a problem for the entire process.

From the beginning, Cerretta expressed interest in one piece of furniture that she would upholster entirely on her own. I could respect her wanting to expand her properties experience and building her portfolio, so I agreed. She wanted to reupholster the roundabout chair, and I could not see a problem with this. Though a challenge, she knew she could ask questions or conduct research if she encountered something she could not figure out or make-work. Within the first few weeks of production I gave Cerretta fabric for the piece so she could begin. It was not until the week before technical rehearsals that she began the project. Granted, she was dealing with all of the small hand properties, but I thought she could have begun the process sooner. As time flew by and the chair was still not finished, I expressed my concern over its completion by the first technical rehearsal to Cerretta. She immediately became defensive and told me she was consumed with other priorities pertaining to the production so I offered to help or take over the project. She was unwilling to take assistance but stressed that it would be completed in time. The first, second and third technical rehearsals came and went and the roundabout chair was still not completed. I received a promise that it would be finished by the final dress rehearsal the following night. The chair was done, but I was not happy with the black lace that surrounded the legs from the seat to the floor. This was a choice I had made, so I did not blame Cerretta. I thought it was too flat and cheapened the piece. I informed Cerretta that I wanted to change the skirt. She felt like she had put enough time and effort into the chair and was unwilling to invest more. I
informed her that I could make time and replace it myself if need be. She did not want me to touch the chair and let me know that she would take care of it. Cerretta thought she would not be able to say that she had upholstered the piece if she had not completed every aspect of reupholstering. It was the day of opening and I had grown impatient over the job not being done, so I began the process of removing and reapplying the lace just before curtain on opening night. Cerretta took over after I reinstructed her on the upholstery technique and finished just in time for it to go on stage. Once completed, I was pleased with the look of the roundabout chair, which was solid white silk upholstery against black spindles and skirted with black lace.

Act three posed the largest challenge in regards to furniture. We needed a desk and chair, small drink table, a poker table with three chairs and a large chaise lounge. The chaise lounge was the most difficult piece to acquire due to the specifications we had. It could not have a back and the arm length had to be high enough for someone to sit on comfortably. It also needed to be long enough to properly lounge upon. After much searching we felt the best solution was to build the piece. Cooper and I accumulated research images and presented them to Donaghy. We pointed out elements we liked, needed, and could not have. She took this information and built a structure that I then padded with foam, upholstered in black crushed velvet and trimmed with white cord. I consider this the best-looking piece in the entire show. The desk and all of the chairs were pulled from stock and painted black with white accents. The table was purchased and painted black then draped with a black tablecloth edged with white fringe. The drink table was constructed from scrap lumber with legs pulled from stock, which was then draped with two built tablecloths. Behind the desk and chair up center were
long black satin drapes trimmed with white fringe, which were attached to a large black valance detailed with white ribbon.

When I heard the words black and white from Patterson I naturally assumed all elements of the production would be just that, black and white. While working on the show one night, I was approached by Donaghy about the color of the paint that had just arrived. She questioned whether or not we were planning on keeping the color of the paint a true bright white. I told her that was the idea. The show was, after all, black and white. She informed me that the costume designer, Prucha, had found a dress for Lady Windermere that was not a pure white. Prucha’s thought was that if the set was pure white and Lady Windermere’s dress did not match her rooms the audience would think she did not belong in the space. I spoke to Prucha that evening and we talked about what she was thinking and the dress she had found. I understood her concern and had no problem slightly tinting the paint color in order to make the production more unified. She thought I might be upset, but I was quite the opposite. I was happy she was able to find a dress that fit the main character so well. We had not begun painting yet, thus changing the color of the paint was not a problem. I informed the scenic charge for the production, Lauren Blunk, a third year undergraduate design major. She was comfortable with this decision and we moved forward. Blunk, who had never held the position of scenic charge, did need guidance, but took initiative and gave her all to the production. Kawamoto helped Blunk every step of the way, but due to construction being behind in their schedule, paint was directly affected. They were constantly painting, but it seemed they were never done. I had thought at the outset of the production that for the first time the paint crew would get a break and not have as much to do. I could not have been more
wrong. They had more work due to the amount of detail involved in the molding of both sides of the six, ten-foot tall units. Darlington’s fireplace unit not only involved molding, the opening was surrounded by painted tile. The stage floor became a topic of discussion far later in the process than anyone would have liked. Once Patterson began using the somewhat completed units during rehearsals she discovered that they left scuffmarks on the floor. This was unavoidable, but is something I should have considered at the beginning of the process. We spoke about what was possible, which was extremely limited due to our rule about there being no gray in the show. This was resolved by using a very subtle marble technique. The black floor was given grout lines with white paint to represent large slabs of marble. Then, through the use of a light hand and a feather, marble veining was added to the large squares. I was skeptical about areas of the floor looking gray, but once I saw the completed floor I could not have been happier. It was exactly what we needed and you could never see scuffmarks again.

Days before the first technical rehearsal the show’s stage manager, Nikki Kelly, a senior undergraduate directing and management student, Cooper and I spent several hours over three days working out the transitions and who was to move what, when and to where. With as much furniture and scenic pieces as we had, this was a very necessary but arduous process. In the end, nearly all we had worked out was used only as a basic framework for the act changes, as they all evolved once we had everyone and everything on stage. During the technical rehearsal process the biggest problem I saw was the act three London rooftop cutout. Baye had not hung adequate lights to illuminate the cutout. It was also painted black and behind the black scrim. These things combined to make the entire piece, which was thirty feet in length and six feet tall, completely unseen. I spoke
to Donaghy, Baye, Blunk, Kawamoto, and Cooper about the best way to rectify the problem. The only solution offered was to paint the sides of the wood white while Baye attempted to intensify the lighting on the cutout. In the end this did not help in the slightest and the piece remained unseen.

On the final night of technical and dress rehearsal in the transition from act three to four there was an accident on stage. As the St. James treetop cutout was being flown in, its base landed on a fog machine platform that had been misplaced. This threw the large piece off balance, causing it to fall forward into the black scrim. Scrim is not designed to endure this amount of strain. Upon removing the cutout we found three large holes in the scrim. Scrim is a loose woven fabric that when lit correctly from the front appears opaque. When rear lit, it is translucent and all behind it becomes visible. With that, scrim is not easily fixable. The following day Janice Stauffer, the costume design advisor, spent several hours repairing the holes in our scrim. To make matters worse, the scrim had been borrowed from the local community playhouse, which meant we would need to replace this costly theatrical piece.

With the scrim repaired, and all of the units painted and the furnishings upholstered, we had reached opening night and whether ready or not, the show was opening. Either way, I was ready for the show to open. I had sat with this show and its concept for more than nine months and was desperate for something new. I loved the time I spent with everyone working on this production, but all good things must come to an end.
Chapter Eight: Final Thoughts

There is no way to change the past, we can only learn from the events that took place. With that, I have regrets about the production but would not change a thing about the experience. I am constantly told that I am too aggressive. During this production I attempted to take a less assertive role and allow others to feel they could approach me at anytime with any question, concern, or criticism. Prucha, Blunk, Donaghy, Cooper, Kelley, Patterson and I had great communication throughout the entire production. If there was a problem we were always willing and able to work through anything. However, this was not the case with Baye. I felt as though he and I were always competing, without either knowing why, to see which design element was more important. I do not think any design element is any more or less important than the others. They must all work together in order to create the most unified and serving design for the script at hand. I know Baye has differing opinions about this. I try to live life with no regrets, but not having approached Baye during the process about my concerns is one of them. I could clearly see that what he was doing with the light, and specifically the color, was not what I felt we were attempting to achieve with the show. The lighting was inconsistent and often turned the white fabrics and scenic elements amber, blue, or purple in color. I felt this completely went against the intention of the show and do wish that I had been a better collaborator. Baye and I did not speak much during the process and this complicated the matter. There is nothing I can to do to change the way I handled the situation or the end product. I can only accept it and move forward.
In regards to the scenic elements, I look at this production with pride and an immense sense of accomplishment. As I look back on my first meetings with Patterson and all of the obstacles to overcome I have mixed feelings about the process. I know I handled the problems as best I could and always considered what was best for the production as a whole first. To consider Patterson’s firm ideas of the show being entirely black and white and my excitement over the idea and the way in which it manifested itself on stage brings me immense joy. The end product was beautifully designed and honored the text and was further brought to life by Prucha’s costumes, which were of couture quality, rivaling any I have seen at any university or on any movie screen. Patterson highlighted the design with her naturalistic and period staging. The scenic elements had presence but did not pull focus, and most importantly, served the script and the vision of the director.

This production, specifically my involvement, was a compilation of all the knowledge, growth and experience I have taken from my time at the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film. Though a difficult road that I am glad it is coming to an end, I look at my time here with joy. Happiness for the way I have grown, happiness for those I have affected and who have affected me, and above all, the future. A future filled with hope, fear, optimism and the wisdom I have gained from this show and others.

Onward and forward.
Appendix A: Research Images
Figure 17  
Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 18  Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 19  Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 20  Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 21  Victorian Drawing Room

Figure 22  Victorian Drawing Room
Figure 23  Victorian Parlor

Figure 24  Victorian Parlor
Figure 27  Victorian Drawing Room

Figure 28  Victorian Drawing Room
Figure 29  
Current entrance hall at #10-11 Carlton House Terrace

Figure 30  
Victorian writing desk
Figure 32  Victorian roundabout seat

Figure 31  Victorian roundabout seat

Figure 33  Victorian settee
Figure 35  Rococo style English Victorian chair

Figure 34  Victorian writing desk
Appendix B: Drawings
Elevation of Units B & C
Elevation of Unit D
Elevation of Unit F
Elevation of Platforming and Railing A
Elevation of Stair Unit
Elevation of Railing B and Molding Detail
Elevations of Ground Rows

ACT III ROOF FLYING GROUND ROW

ST. JAMES PARK CUTOUT
Appendix C: Show Images
**Bibliography**

Plate 1  Web. 7 Mar. 2011.  

<http://www.victorianstation.com/draw.htm>


<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative>.

Plate 5  Web. 7 Mar. 2011.  
<http://www.traditionalproductgalleries.com/Rinterior-interior.htm>

Plate 6  Image of Lady Windermere side of finished unit.

Plate 7  Image of one-half inch scale model for final act one layout.

Plate 8  Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Plate 9  Art installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Plate 10  Original concept sketch for act two.

Plate 11  Image of fan borrowed from UNL costume shop.

Plate 12  Original concept sketch for act two.

Plate 13  Image of half-inch scale model for final act two layout.

Plate 14  Image of half-inch scale model for final act three layout.

Plate 15  Image of Lady Windermere side of finished unit.

Plate 16  Image of Lord Darlington side of finished unit.

<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_dHMykwjxiWM/TRzIoBzv3I/AAAAAAAAAIpO/mEs0KixNXIM/s1600/797px-The_red_drawing_room>
Plate 22  Web. 7 Mar. 2011.  
<http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/mining_and_railroads/>

<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=6574&DMSCALE=39.06250&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=5&DMTH>

<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=6575&DMSCALE=43.13444&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=4&DMTH>

<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_dHMUkWjxiWM/TRzIA-ZVJIJ/AAAAAAAAIPk/zJxKJERGpvM/s1600/Green_Drawing_room_Dorchester_House.jpg>

Plate 26  Web. 7 Mar. 2011.  
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/32/images/hh32g5.jpg>

<http://www.cincinnatimemory.org/gsdl/collect/greaterc/archives/HASH8bf3/e7d9be2f.dir/ocp000743pcpfb.jpg>

<http://www.bartiesworld.co.uk/postcards/osborne/fullsize/osborne4.jpg>

<http://www.10-11cht.com/images/landing/rooms/receptionten/receptionten01.jpg>

<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=6517&DMSCALE=75.37688&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=3&DMTH>

<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=8690&DMSCALE=39.06250&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20roundabout&REC=1&D>
Plate 32  
<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=6522&DMSCALE=39.06250&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=19&DMT>

Plate 33  
<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=6523&DMSCALE=39.06250&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=18&DMT>

Plate 34  
<http://contentdm.unl.edu/cgi-bin/getimage.exe?CISOROOT=/decorative&CISOPTR=8670&DMSCALE=50.50505&DMWIDTH=600&DMHEIGHT=600&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=%20victorian&REC=9&DMTH>

Plate 35  
Works Consulted


