

# Costume Designers of Hollywood Films

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## **I . Preface**

Costume designers for films can be regarded as apparel creators; they are not the same as commercial fashion designers, who create new trends for the public every year or every season.

A cinematic designer creates costumes that would allow the characteristics of the drama hero or heroine to stand out and that would enhance the aesthetics of the film. Therefore, a costume designer must keep in mind that his or her designs should be made in such a way as to express the personalities of the film's characters and to match with the genre of the film.

This study will look into the features of the costume designs that have been created by costume designers working for Hollywood filmmakers.

## **II . Clothes and Costumes Created by Cinematic Costume Designers**

### **1. James Acheson**

James Acheson regards as costume design every thing that helps movie actors/actresses develop their talents; he believes that the main role of cinematic costumes is to help actors/actresses perform their parts well and create an imaginary world, which he believes is the main task of actors/actresses. Thus, "the actors/actresses must wear the costumes and not the other way around; it is not the costumes that must wear the actors/actresses," says Acheson. The designer made his earnest debut into the cinematic world with costume designs for a number of Monty Python's films, like <Last Emperor> (1987), <Sheltering Sky> (1990), <Little Buddha> (1994), and <Brazil> (1985), to name a few.

Recently, Acheson provided costume designs for modern cinematic plays like Sam Raimi's <Spiderman>, freeing himself from his usual role of creating costume designs for historical films despite his success with films belonging to such genre, like <Last Emperor> (1987), <Sheltering Sky> (1990), and <Little Buddha> (1994) of Italy's Bernardo Bertolucci (1940- ).

Like all good costume designers, Acheson has a talent for digesting the content of a film. He is absorbed in his designs, working intensely and with precision, but he tends to deviate from the center from time to time.

Acheson is a costume designer who is faithful to a film's script. In fact, he considers it important to read the script of a film he was commissioned to create costumes for before working on his designs. Although he usually could not visualize the whole film only by reading its script, he would keep himself busy thinking about the costumes for the film, such as what

costumes would go well with a particular actor/actress or scene, how these could be made, etc. He would read the script two or three more times after his initial reading of it, and would discuss with the film's director all day long his ideas on the costumes that would fit the film.

It sounds strange to hear, though, that Acheson's works tend to outclass the cinematic costumes that Beavan and Bright have created. The settings of Acheson's film projects include North Africa, China, and even Nepal, where Beavan and Bright have never been to. His costume designs, therefore, complement the settings of the films for which they were made.

The following are some of the films that Acheson has created costumes for: <Daredevil> (2003), <Spiderman> (2002), <The Little Vampire> (2000), <The Man in the Iron Mask> (1998), Emily Bronte's <Wuthering Heights> (1992), <Highlander> (1986), <Brazil> (1985), and <Time Bandits> (1982).

## **2. Sandy Powell**

Putting aside modern-day cinematic plays, Sandy Powell has concentrated on designing the costumes that were worn in Europe during the Renaissance to the 1800s, which were marked with frills and toupees. She created the cinematic costumes for <Caravaggio> (1986) and <The Last of England> (1987) of Derek Jarman (1942-1994), an English avant-garde director; <Orlando> of Sally Potter; <Crying Game> (1992); and <Interview with the Vampire> (1994) of Ireland's Neil Jordan (1925- ). She has developed a liking for old stories and has shown a deep interest in the Victorian Era (1837-1901) and the Edwardian Period (1901-1910), as well as in the Gregorian times, which has driven her to strike a deal with Merchant Ivory Productions requiring her to create costumes for its films. The costumes she created for these films faithfully depicted on the screen the conditions during the particular historical times in which the films were set.

Powell made elegant costumes for the following films: <Gangs of New York> (2002), <Felicia's Journey> (1999), <End of the Affair> (1999), <Miss Julie> (1999), <Shakespeare in Love> (1998), <Hilary and Jackie> (1998), <Velvet Goldmine> (1998), <Wings of the Dove> (1997), <Butcher Boy> (1997), <Michael Collins> (1998), <Rob Roy> (1995), <Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles> (1994), <Interview with the Vampire> (1994) (USA: short title), <Being Human> (1993), <Wittgenstein> (1993), <Crying Game> (1992), <Orlando> (1992), and <Edward II> (1991).

## **3. Colleen Atwood**

Colleen Atwood is an outstanding costume designer as far as sensual designs are concerned. She started her career as an assistant to a movie studio's designer. She then showed her talent in designing costumes and movie settings for the music videos of Groom's <Sting>.

In 1995, Atwood was nominated for an Academy Award for the costumes she created for the film <Little Women>; in the same year, she was nominated for a BAFTA costume award. She

was also nominated for a BAFTA costume award for the costumes she created for Tim Burton's <Edward Scissorhands>. It was also in that year that she took charge of designing the costumes for Burton's <Assault of the Martians>.

Atwood's works transcend times and genres. In historical films, her costume designs, which differ among themselves according to the social status of their wearers, calmly transmit the cinematic atmosphere of the films for which they were created. Her creativity in designing comes from her vivid imagination and keen sensibility.

Apart from costumes during the ancient times, she has also designed 1950s and 1960s costumes. The clothes then were ridiculous and shoddy. How ridiculously cocky were the men and women during those times in those clothes! Atwood, however, managed to make the films' actors/actresses look fascinating, though funny, in the 1950s and 1960s costumes she created for them. As the costumes' light colors were drab, the actors/actresses who wore them looked ridiculously gay but attractive, beaming with the mediocre dreams of the middle class then.

Atwood created the costumes for the following films: <Cinemagique> (2002), <Golden Dreams> (2001), "Tick, The" (2001), <Planet of the Apes> (2001), <Mexican> (2001), <Sleepy Hollow> (1999), <Mumford> (1999), <Beloved> (1998), <Fallen> (1998), <Gattaca> (1997), <Buddy> (1997), <Cabin Boy> (1994), <Little Women> (1994), <Ed Wood> (1994), <Wyatt Earp> (1994), <Born Yesterday> (1993), <Philadelphia> (1993), <Love Field> (1992), <Lorenzo's Oil> (1992), <Rush> (1991), <Silence of the Lambs> (1991), <Edward Scissorhands> (1990), and <Joe versus the Volcano> (1990).

#### **4. Lindy Hemming**

Lindy Hemming made stylish dress suits for the films <Four Weddings and a Funeral> and <Hear My Song>. It was also she who made stylish formal suits for the gangsters in <The Krays>, a story about gangsters in the 1960s. She was commissioned to create costumes for the films of movie directors like Mike Leigh and Peter Chelsom. Her costume designs depict the image of the modern British people. Her works include costumes for the following films: <Lara Croft: Tomb Raider> (2001), <Tomb Raider> (2001) (USA: short title), <The Man who Cried> (2000) / <The Man who Cried ? Les L'armes d'un Homme> (2001) (France), <The World Is Not Enough> (1999), <Pressure Point> (1999) (USA: changed title/T.W.I.N.E. (1999) (UK: promotional abbreviation), <Trench> (1999), <Topsy-turvy> (1999), <Little Voice> (1998), <Tomorrow Never Dies> (1997), <Brave> (1997), <Blood and Wine> (1997) (video box title), <Golden Eye> (1995), <Funny Bones> (1995), <Sister, My Sister> (1994), <Four Weddings and a Funeral> (1994), <Naked> (1993), and Mike Leigh's <Naked> (1993).

#### **5. Jenny Beavan & John Bright**

Jenny Beavan and John Bright have been working for Merchant Ivory Productions for some time now. Their works include authentic costumes for historical dramas. Beavan worked with Hugh Grant in high-toned films like <Impromptu> and <Sense & Sensibility>. In <Swing Kids>,

she created costumes that were different from her previous works. Her team adopted the refined European middle class of 150 years ago as the object of their designs. They have also created costumes of nobles, costumes depicting life in the royal court, and costumes for films about spectacular wars. They have participated many times in cinematic costume designing for non-European and exotic stages like <Mountains of the Moon> (1990) and <Black Beauty> (1994).

In <Anna and the King>, Beavan created exotic costumes for the Sham court of the 1860s. Her other works include costumes for the following films: <Gosford Park> (2001), <Possession> (2001), <Anna and the King> (1999), <Tea with Mussolini> (1999), <Te con Mussolini> (In Italy) (1999), <Ever After> (1998), <Emma> (1997) (TV mini-series), <Metroland> (1997), <Jane Eyre> (1996) (France), <Sense and Sensibility> (1995), <Jefferson in Paris> (1995), <Black Beauty> (1994), <Swing Kids> (1993), <Remains of the Day> (1993), <Black Heathen Poisonings> (1992) (TV), <Bridge> (1992), <Howard' s End> (1992), <Impromptu> (1991), <Back Home> (1990) (TV), and <Mountains of the Moon> (1990).

## **6. Judianna Makovsky**

Judianna Makovsky built her career as a fashion designer for 15 years before she started dabbling with cinematic costume designing. She is now widely recognized as one of the most talented costume designers in the world. The objects of her designs range from the American poor, the Westerns, baseball players, ocean voyagers, and heroes/heroines in modern versions of the stories written by Charles Dickens, covering all kinds of genres and settings. She has inspired many cinematic costume designers.

Makovsky received an Academy Award in 1998 for the costumes she created for the film <Pleasantville>, and was conferred a prestigious award by the Costume Designers Guild, as recommended by her colleagues. Her works include costumes for the following films: <Harry Potter and the Sorcerer' s Stone> (2001), <Legend of Bagger Vance> (2000), <For Love of the Game> (1999), <Practical Magic> (1998), <Pleasantville> (1998), <Great Expectations> (1998), <Devil' s Advocate> (1997), <Lolita> (1997), <White Squall> (1996), <Little Princess> (1995), <The Quick and the Dead> (1995), and <Specialist> (1994).

## **7. Janet Patterson**

Janet Patterson stands unchallenged in terms of making 19th-century cinematic costume designs. She was nominated for an Oscar Costume Award, a BAFTA Award, and the costume award of Australian Cinema College for the costumes she created for the film <Piano> (1993) by Jane Campion (1954- , New Zealand). She was born in Sydney, Australia, where she took up Interior Design. She started her career in 1980, as a production designer for a TV series at the Australia Broadcasting Station, a job that she kept until 1990. In 1991, she made the costumes for the film <The Last Days Chez Nous> by Gilliam Armstrong (1950- , Australia). Since 1990, she has been working with movie directors Campion and Armstrong. She made the costumes for the following films: <Holy Smoke> (1999), <Oscar and Lucinda> (1997),

<Portrait of a Lady> (1996), <Piano> (1993), <Lecon de Piano, La> (1993) (France), <Last Days of Chez Nous, The> (1992), and <Two Friends> (1986) (TV).

### **III. Conclusion**

Those who perform in cinematic dramas, from drama heroes and heroines to extras, are invariably the objects of cinematic costume designers. It is necessary for these designers to remain well versed in the overall plots of the dramas they have been commissioned to make costumes for. They should constantly think of costume designs that combine well with, and even help establish, the dramatic atmosphere in these films, scene by scene. It will be noted that most of the movies that are well loved by the public and that have become commercially successful are movies where the actors/actresses wear scrupulously designed costumes.

Without exception, all the film studios in Hollywood overtly earmark a prodigious amount of their yearly budget for the production of blockbusters aiming at capturing not only the domestic but also the overseas markets. Such blockbusters utilize spectacular visual effects in terms of settings, lightings, and computer graphics. The time and money spent on making the costumes for these films is also enormous, regardless of the movie genre. Accordingly, costume designers for historical dramas are compelled to produce costumes that accurately depict what people wore during the times in which such dramas are set. Likewise, costume designers for sci-fi (SF) (Editor's note: Is this what you mean?) films are expected to create costumes with new concepts. Cinematic costumes are supposed to transmit to the viewers the significance of the dramas in which they are used as well as these dramas' aesthetic effects, scene by scene and without pause, through the costumes' designs and colors and through the quality of the fabric to be used in making these costumes.

In movies, costumes are another kind of language. They are, therefore, symbolic tools of communication that are as complicated and as profound as the language that movie directors use.