

## *Arsenic and Old Lace* Initial Design Concepts

**SCENIC DESIGN:** In order to start work on blocking, John and I roughed out the basic floor plan several weeks ago. Even so, the vast size and complexity of this set will require quite a bit of research, creativity, and development on the part of the scenic designers to fully flesh things out. I've listed the basic layout of the set in the diagram listed in the back of this packet. Here are a few of the general guidelines I'd like to follow:

- **Looming Walls:** The height of the walls is very important. On the US side we need extreme height out of necessity to cover two stories. However, we should plan on going beyond the bare minimum. It's a Victorian mansion, so we'd have unusually high walls beyond the norm anyway. Let's go as high as we safely can. The walls should:
  - Offer an impression of a bit of a looming space
  - Focus attention towards both the main playing area as well as the stairway, landings, and main hall above
- **Victorian décor and interior decoration.** The home is essentially a time capsule for the aunts, and the overall impression it offers should display this sense. Some of the things we need are:
  - Dark woodwork for stair railing, knoll post, trim, etc.
  - Victorian style wallpaper
  - A chandelier
  - Excessive drapery and window treatments
  - Visibly installed electric lighting
- **Scenic backing behind all exits**
  - SR door needs to offer an exterior backing
  - SL double hinge windows require another exterior backing
  - USL door requires kitchen wall backing
  - USC door requires cellar stairway backing
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level USC door requires bedroom backing (Matha's room)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level USL archway require no backing, but a door must be installed beyond the sightlines of the audience. This will be used for lighting effects
- **A peaceful façade to cover the grizzly truths of the home.** I'm not sure how I would like this to unfold, but let's play with the idea that the surface appearance of this space is sweet, refined, and elegant, albeit outdated. However, what things can be incorporated into the design that are not immediately apparent or evident that suggest the darker truths of the goings-on in the home? See what you can come up with.
- **Sturdy structures:** This is tricky, I know. However, when a door slams, I don't want to see the entire structure shake. That breaks our illusion immediately. Keep in mind. The durability of the window seat is also very important, as bodies will fall into it, be pulled out of it, etc.
- **Prominent staircase:** The stair unit is utilized many, many times throughout the show. Not only does Teddy make his several charges up it, but other characters are featured prominently on it throughout the entire play. As such, we need clear visibility of characters as they use the stair unit.

**LIGHTING DESIGN:** At first glance, your job may appear easy. It isn't. There are a remarkably high number of significantly varied lighting cues that will be used in the show. We've never done a traditional box set for a fall play. The very fact that we only have one interior space to light actually opens up a few options that we wouldn't normally have. Here are a few of the lighting components we'll need to plan on having:

- Daytime interior lighting suggesting a wash of natural light into the space from windows
- Artificial interior lighting at night that suggests light origins from sources such as the chandelier, wall fixtures, and one or two lamps on the floor
- Exit backing light sources to indicate very different environments

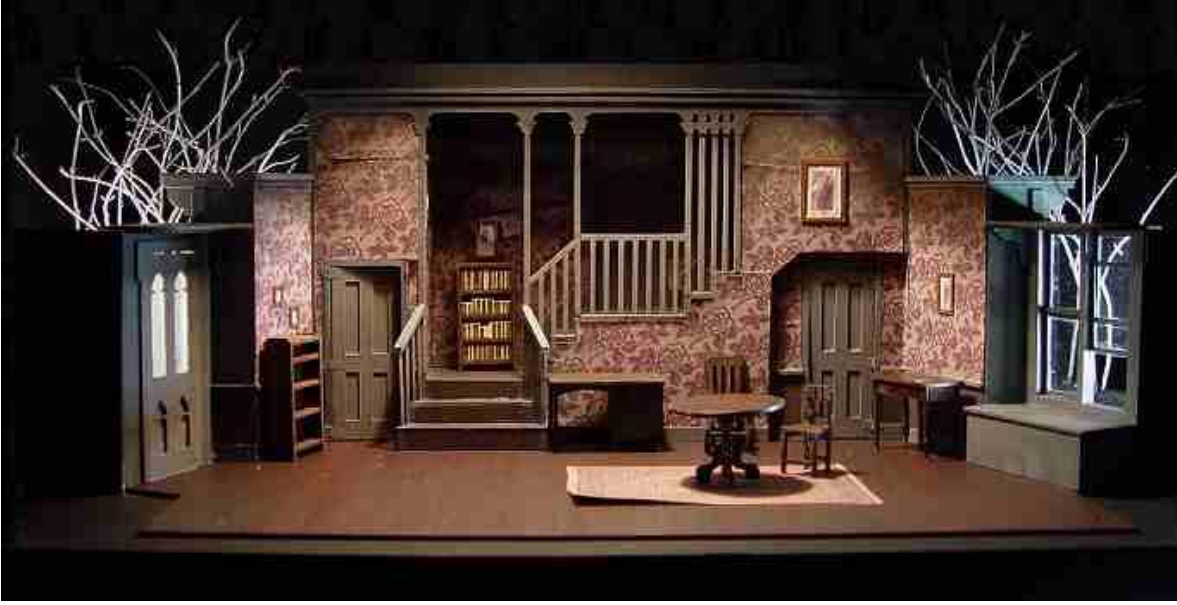
- The double hung window backing area requires bright daylight lighting as well as lighting from an unseen streetlamp at night.
- The front door backing area also requires an instrument for both daytime as well as nighttime lighting
- The kitchen requires lighting, but we can probably use the same instrument for both day and night.
- The cellar requires a bit of a lower light quality in the backing area.
- A light source is needed for Martha's room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level USC
- A lighting unit must also be placed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level USL area, just SL of the doorway. This light will pour down the upstairs hallway and landings as the door is opening
- The second level lighting brings wall height to mind once again, walls must be high enough to mask a reasonable amount of light spill from the sources in the backing zones beyond the exits
- Lighting cues synced with actor's blocking in key sections
  - There are many moments when actors make us of the wall-mounted light switch. We need to practice training actors to trust tech for these cues to occur successfully
- We'll need to play with balance, placement, and gel selections to achieve the best possible effects that we can. Although we've got a comedy on our hands, there is ample opportunity to really heighten suspense and fear during a few key moments of the show.
- We also need 1-2 specials to indicate lighting from the candelabras that will be positioned on the SL table during a few moments in the show. Just like Edsel Ford and his wife, Abby and Martha prefer to take tea and dine by candlelight.

**SOUND DESIGN:** There are not that many sound cues to contend with on this production. We may add a few items such as a car pulling towards the house, but that's about it. We will need some work on music selection for pre-show, intermission, and the one scene break we have. We'll also need to discuss the possibility of mic'ing actors. We haven't done this for a fall show in a very long time. However, we haven't had new sound equipment or a limited cast size in the past either. We'll come back to this item as the process unfolds.

**PROPERTY DESIGN:** There is a TON for you to gather, create, and organize on this show. You're going to have fun and be quite busy. Some items are straightforward and will just require acquisition. However, there are also several other items that will be very enjoyable for you to develop. Case in point, Einstein's medical kit. This bag will contain any number of curious, frightening, and even humorous devices that would, presumably, be used for both constructive and destructive surgery. I'll try to work up a prop list as soon as I can. However, there's a pretty complete one that's listed in the back of the script.

For some analysis and discussion of scenic design plan from other productions of the show, continue reading.

## *Arsenic and Old Lace Scenic Designs*



I'm not sure that I like the enclosed stair unit in this design. I'm definitely not a fan of the shortened SL & SR walls. Yes, the trees offer a disconcerting sense of the activities that take place within the home they surround, but it's a little over the top.



This isn't a bad design, per say, but it's a little swat. We definitely have both width and height to play with in our space. As such, I'd really like to use them both.



This design doesn't really do much for me. It's basic. I'm not sure why it feels so utterly plain and uninspiring, it just does.



Okay, I like the open appearance of the stairs in this design. I also really enjoy the sense of height we're given with the walls. The space *should* appear as somewhat of a vault. It's immense overall size should make the actors seem somehow vulnerable.





Too tight of a design. They were obviously limited with regards to size in this performance space. It's too condensed.



I love the window treatments. Not sure about much else in this design.



Wow. This is a very beautiful design. I placement of the sideboard is pretty intrusive, but I pretty much love everything else.



You can't really make it out very well from this photo, but the designer of this set had a very interesting concept. It's almost as if he or she wanted to place with accents that illicit mental images of skeletal structures. This is most evident in the staircase spindles and the back doors. I really don't like the design. I kind of creeps me out. I'm not sure that's what I'm looking for.





This is a beautiful design, but odd. It offers a glimpse of the outside life of the house. Interesting.



Again, this feels much tighter than what I'd like us to end up with. Again, I really don't care for the boxed in feel of the stair unit.



Love the width, hate the height. It's also not really an appropriate color scheme. This is too bright and inviting, which is a choice. I'm just not sure it's a choice we should make.



REALLY enjoy this design a lot. It has all of the basic elements. Nice open stair unit with a landing and a turn. Great furniture placement. Just the right color scheme and lighting. This is probably a favorite.





Again, this was a clear choice, but I don't like the choice that was made. It's almost an homage to the film version of the show.



This isn't a bad design. Apparently, width was again an issue.