


THE CREATIVE TEAM

The role of the costume designer is quite varied and quite complicated. The costume designer is responsible for the overall look and feel of the costumes and reports directly to the director of the production. Once a play and its director are chosen, the next step is to assemble a **creative team**. The initial team includes the costume designer, set designer (sometimes called the production designer), and if the play contains music and dance, a music director and a choreographer. All of these roles require research, creative thought, and teamwork in order to produce a successful play.

Working with the Director

The director is the hub of the production, and the costume designer is an essential spoke. Together, they work to establish how the visual impact of costumes will add to the audience's appreciation of the play. They begin by discussing time period, color, style, and mood. Mood is the feeling and atmosphere that the play presents—in other words, how the play will make the audience feel. Although the actors' words and



A creative team uses art, technology, and a lively exchange of ideas to get a production up and running.

movements present the mood, the costume designer's contributions to creating mood are very important. Time period is another principal consideration. The director may want to see a traditional representation of a certain time period or may want the costume designer to tweak the style to create a different interpretation of the play. Color is key to the discussion, as color helps reveal a character's personality or temperament, such as muted colors for a meek character and bold colors for a dominant character. Style will be coordinated closely with time period and setting. After many conversations, the costume designer shows the director his or her sketches, **mood boards**, **look books**, and **tear sheets** to make sure that he or she is understanding the director's aims and vision. A mood board is a collage that communicates the look and feel of a costume, such as color **swatches**, sketches, and fabric samples. The mood board describes the character's costume using terms such as elegant, funny, aggressive, romantic, historic, or frightening. A tear sheet is a collection of examples of possible design ideas torn from magazines, newspapers, or images downloaded from the internet. A costume designer's look book is a collection of photographs of costumes used in other performances.

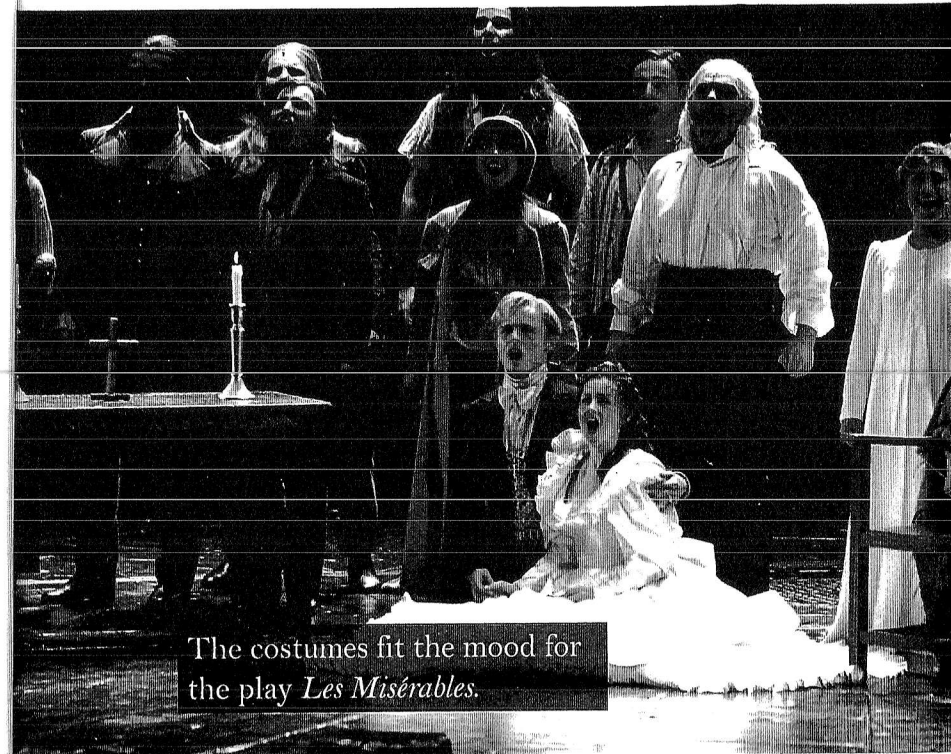
Working with the Set Designer

The physical look and feel of the production are the decision of the director, who then hands the task of creating the look and feel over to the costume and set designers. The set designer and costume designer together create the mood and emotion of the play and

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emphasize the historical or geographic setting for the play. The set designer and costume designer use visual elements to engage and inform the audience. The director and the designers work together to decide whether the set should be realistic or abstract. They can opt for historical, realistic, fantasy, or traditional sets, which will influence the costume designer's approach to the costumes. The costume designer and set designer need to work closely so that the costumes and the set are complementary.

It is their job to work together to visually communicate to the audience the emotions, status, or motivations of the characters. For instance, characters who are part of a crowd or do not have speaking roles would likely wear costumes that are inconspicuous.



The costumes fit the mood for the play *Les Misérables*.

Main characters have costumes that more actively interact with the set. During lively scenes, sets may be bold and colorful, and so might the costumes.

Quiet scenes may call for muted colors on the part of both the set and costume designers. The set designer, costume designer, and director need to decide whether the set should be colorful or monotone, and if the set will be colored, they must choose a palette—bright primary colors or muted colors, such as pale yellow, rose, or tan. Once that decision has been made, work between the designers must focus on how the set colors and the costume colors interact. Once color and mood have been established, the costume designer and set designer are free to explore their creativity.

The director needs the set designer and the costume designer to understand one another in order for each of them to move forward, and that is why it is so important to get the design team together early.

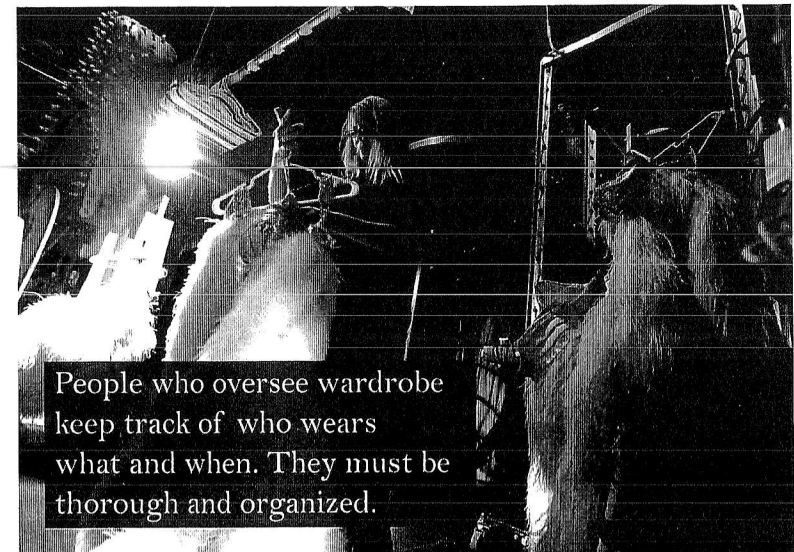
Lighting

The set designer and costume designer also work together to decide how to interact with the lighting director. The set designer, costume designer, lighting director, and director will discuss how light is treated on stage—will it be bright, dim, in shadows, or from spots? For example, if a character is onstage alone and is performing a monologue, the lighting director will often opt for a spotlight. The set designer would likely use for background a set that is low key and unassuming to allow for the actor to literally take center stage. The costume designer must understand the mood of the monologue and choose either a

dramatic costume that would stand out under the lights and against the set, or a simple, unassuming costume that would reflect a somber or sad mood. Set designers, costume designers, and lighting designers combine forces to suggest historical period, time of day, weather, and other parts of the play that are not verbally expressed in the script but are necessary to understanding the story line.

Working With Wardrobe

The wardrobe department is often considered part of the costume department. The two departments work together closely but have different responsibilities. The wardrobe department is in charge of the costumes backstage and is responsible for inventory, cleaning, ironing, and mending. The costume designer and his or her staff guide the wardrobe staff. They instruct the wardrobe staff about which costumes are worn by whom and in what order. They also show



People who oversee wardrobe keep track of who wears what and when. They must be thorough and organized.

the wardrobe staff how to put on the costumes. The wardrobe staff will give feedback to the costume department, advising them if there is any difficulty in doing costume changes efficiently. This can happen if a costume is too complicated to be put on in the time allowed for a particular costume change.

Working With Actors

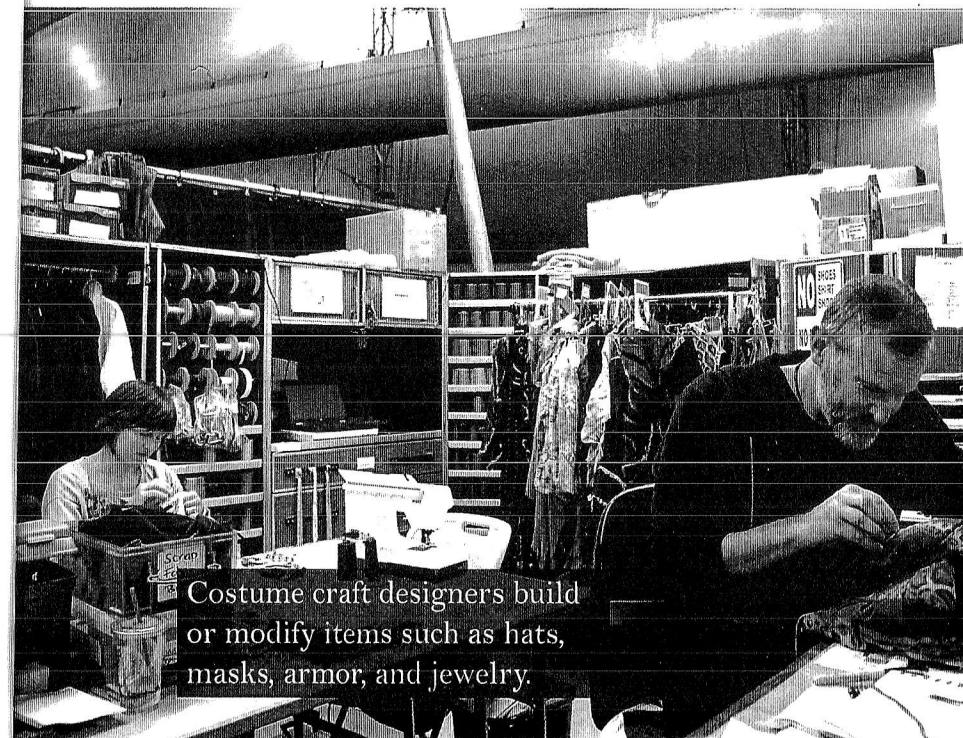
One of the most important and sometimes very complicated relationships is between the costume designer and the actors and their characters. The costume designer creates the costume for the character, but then must also create the costume to best suit the actor. The designer discusses how the actor perceives the role, and that input helps guide the designer. Actors also have their own feelings about how they wear clothes—opinions about comfort, freedom of movement, or color choice, for example. Another challenge for a costume designer doing historical costumes is that the bodies of people today are different from bodies in times past. Many women are now slimmer, and many men are bigger, so period costumes must be adapted to seem historically correct while still fitting the wearer.

Going Big

In large productions, costume designers must be effective and resourceful managers. They create the designs and oversee the work of others in the department. As the costume department team leader, costume designers give instructions to assistants,

shoppers, and technicians. In a big production, the costume designer maintains creative control and interacts with the director and the set, makeup, sound, and lighting designers. He or she researches styles and settings, determines fabrics and other materials, and delegates practical work to assistants and technical staff.

Very large theater groups, such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland or the Huntington Theater Company in Boston, have large budgets and many specialized crew members. The costume designer collaborates with the team leaders of the various costume technical crews. These technical teams include drapers, tailors, pattern cutters, pattern drafters, **costume craft artisans**, wigmakers, painters



Costume craft designers build or modify items such as hats, masks, armor, and jewelry.

and dyers, **stitchers**, costume **fitters**, shoppers, costume rental managers, wardrobe personnel, business office staff, and budget managers.

In many large and medium-sized productions, costume designers rely heavily on assistant costume designers. The costume designer's assistant helps in countless ways, especially as more and more costume designers are called upon to manage budgets, supervise other departments, and communicate repeatedly with accountants, directors, producers, and other creative-department heads. The most effective assistants understand the designer's vision and way of doing things. By earning the designer's trust, assistants have more freedom to shop, help design, and oversee costume construction. Others in the costume department often come to the assistant first to solve problems, such as running out of fabric or handling last minute costume change requests. Ken Van Duyne, a costume assistant, said that his boss taught him "a lot about working with kindness, and how it's a collaborative job—not only between the director and the actor—but it's also a collaborative process with the crew."

Small Scale

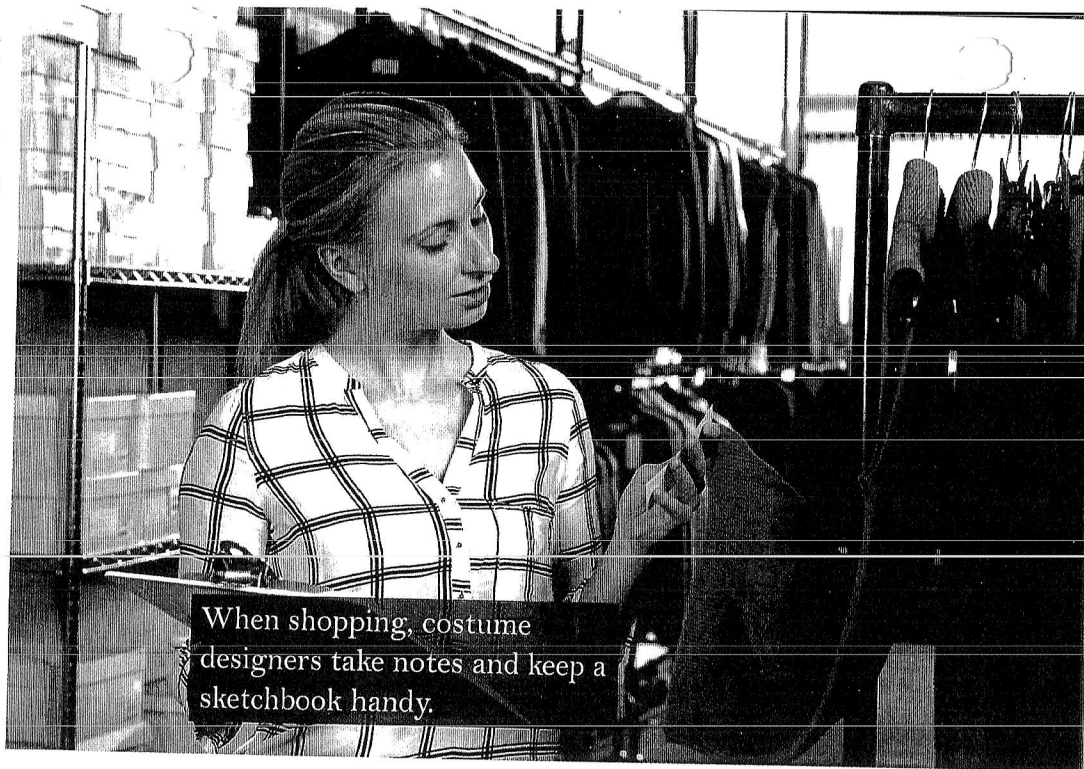
In smaller productions, such as the ones done at your school, the costume designer may not only design the costumes and shop for the costumes, but will often make the costumes, too. A costume designer in smaller productions manages a tight budget. A small costume department will find just a few people taking on most of the work. In this case, a costume designer with a

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small staff, often composed of volunteers, provides or oversees the practical labor—patternmaking and cutting, sewing, and other practical tasks such as knitting, weaving, ironing, cleaning, and mending. Many times in smaller productions, the costume designer will also oversee, or provide, makeup and wardrobe management.

It Never Stops

A theater production begins somewhat calmly—the creative team discusses the script and their individual interpretations of the script. They exchange ideas and communicate regularly while considering what they each will produce. However, once they share a common understanding of the direction the play will take, the pace quickens. Costume designers and their staff must determine costume needs and quickly start shopping and constructing. Several deadlines have to be met, and people rely on others getting their jobs done in order to complete their own. For example, the designer, or the person in charge of selecting the types of fabric, must do so before shopping for the fabric. The designer must relay the costume design so that the patternmaker and cutter can begin. The person who will iron the costume during the sewing process must do the job quickly in order for work to continue. Shoppers who are buying premade garments need to make their selections in a timely fashion so that they can be altered, trimmed, and accessorized. All costumes need to be in very advanced stages and able to be worn in the final week before the play opens, as these rehearsals are full-dress or tech-dress.



When shopping, costume designers take notes and keep a sketchbook handy.

Starting Out

There are many jobs and internships that may help advance your understanding of costume design. A person may be talented, but it takes work to move forward in this field. There are several options for those who want to get practical experience. First, you can volunteer for a lesser role on the costume crew for your high school production. One way to see if you have an interest in costume design is to become and apprentice to tailors or dressmakers, or to work in a clothing store, jewelry store, or for a clothing manufacturer. Taking a job in a beauty salon will help you get an understanding of hairstyling and makeup. People can also benefit by working for a dry cleaner and learning how to clean and handle garments. Probably the most helpful jobs to find are those in fabric or arts and crafts stores.

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It is common for people involved in costume design to have started in an entry-level job. You don't need formal training to work on your high school show, just interest. If you are interested in pursuing a job in costume design, it is best to attend a vocational school, community college, or university to increase your chances for employment. Art, theater, costume, and fashion design classes and programs are demanding. Students must be prepared to study as well as spend long hours in hands-on practice.

Time

The hours required of the costume designer can be very long, especially the last week before the show. Expect to work some weekends and evenings. As much as possible, plan school work or a job to fit the production schedule. People must make sacrifices and forego last minute invitations, such as tickets to a concert. If there are previous plans, such as a family vacation, the director needs to know about them from the start. Being part of a theater production is a commitment that should be honored because so many others are depending on you.