

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

COSTUME DESIGN WITH
ENKEN HAGGE

STATE THEATRE
COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA



THE DESIGN PROCESS

ENKEN HAGGE ON HER COSTUME DESIGN FOR
THE 2019 PRODUCTION OF A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

The journey that brings costume designs from page to stage starts many months out from opening night. *A View From a Bridge* took almost a year, from initial discussions and brainstorming with the director to the final few weeks where a team of over forty people were involved to create the finished production. At every step costume ideas were discussed and decisions were made, always taking into account the requirements of the many people involved - the actors, the set designer (Victoria Lamb), the lighting designer (Chris Petridis) and of course the director, Kate Champion.

The very first discussions for *View* took place over Skype, as all the creatives were in different states at the time. These early talks were important to discover the direction that Kate wanted to take with the production. In the case of *View*, set in 1950s New York, we needed to know how strict Kate wanted to be with portraying the era and the setting. Both the set and costume designs give the audience information about 'where' in history the story takes place and how the characters fit into that space. Kate wanted to stage a production that was not so strongly tied to its 1950s origins. In presenting themes of immigration and gender roles that are still very relevant today, she wanted to create an image that felt timeless. This meant I would not be designing costumes for Beatrice and Catherine that featured 1950's dresses with full skirts, nor were the men all wearing woollen suits with fedoras. We wanted to be able to look at the actors on stage and not immediately place them in 1950's New York. Their story should be one that could have taken place at any time in history, perhaps even right now.

Once we had established the era our production of *A View from a Bridge* was to be set in, and the degree to which we would be adhering to the descriptions of costume given in the script, I could start designing the costumes. I began by collecting a lot of images. These included historical photography, art, even images from contemporary fashion editorials that I felt conveyed the right feeling. I wanted the costumes to be modern, but with a vintage flavour. The women could still wear dresses, perhaps in a vintage print rather than very modern jeans and t-shirts, and Alfieri could still wear a suit, but of a more modern cut and proportion. I wanted to give Kate an idea of where I was heading, so I created mood boards and colour stories around each character.



LEFT: FABRIC CHOICES FOR A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
RIGHT: VICTORIA LAMB'S SET MODEL FOR THE SHOW

As I collected images and decided on the colours that would feature in each character's costume, I always considered how these would fit together with Victoria and Chris's set and lighting designs. The colours should tell a story, as well as look harmonious with the elements used in the set. I could refer to the scale model Victoria had provided, as well as her own collection of images that influenced the set design. I had a mood board for each character, which consisted of a colour story as well as a collection of images from a variety of sources.

At this stage, as I collected images and colours, I hadn't produced any final drawings. This was because Kate's vision could still change and my design would need to accommodate any further developments.

The mood boards I created were what I would present at the 'White Card' presentation, the first time the rest of the State Theatre Company South Australia team would see what we had been working on. The White Card is the first presentation where all the creative team show their ideas and how they fit together as a whole.

Once Kate had seen my mood boards and given feedback, I could take my design ideas further and address the physical details of the script.

Costume is often used to indicate changes in time and season across the span of a play. The script itself made several references to the cold weather, the time of day and whether the characters were inside or outside. There were also several immigration officers who needed specific uniforms, and a scene with a wedding that would possibly require a 'wedding dress' look. Kate and Victoria Lamb, the set designer, had designed a set together that was abstract and minimalist with very little in the way of set dressing or props. This meant that the costumes would provide the only real colour and clues as to the time of day and season.



THE DESIGN DRAWING AND MOOD BOARD FOR RODOLPHO WERE BROUGHT TO LIFE BY THE WARDROBE DEPT.

Social status is also indicated by costume - the Carbone family is very definitely working class, whereas Alfieri would be dressed to reflect his position as a lawyer.

Rodolpho, one of the two illegal immigrants who stay with the Carbones, has an especially clear character arc that is told through his costume. He arrives in New York as a penniless 'submarine' but as he begins to earn his own money he starts buying himself new clothes to update his image. Along the way, his new clothes are part of what drives a wedge between him and Eddie, who thinks that an interest in fashion is unmasculine.

Marco, on the other hand, never changes his costume as he is sending all his money home to his wife in Italy. His look remains static throughout the show.



Costume is a way of telling an unspoken story about the character that lies alongside the dialogue and action being performed. For example, the first time we see Catherine we need to be able to believe that she is a young woman who has deliberately chosen the fashionable clothes she wears and is proud of her new skirt, but that she might still be unaware of the provocative messages those clothes send. This was a scene that I discussed with Kate Champion at great length as it is crucial to understanding the trajectory of the play. I chose to give Catherine a wrap skirt (pictured left) that could potentially reveal more than she had intended. When Maiah Stewardson, who played Catherine, first saw the skirt she had the idea that she wanted to jump into Eddie's arms and so the wrap section would allow her to perform this action easily. In this way, a costume piece has to serve both the narrative needs of the script, the director's vision and, eventually, the actor's performance as well.



LEFT: MAIAH STEWARDSON (CATHERINE) DURING THE FITTING OF A 'TOILE' - A CALICO MOCKUP OF A DRESS BEFORE IT IS MADE IN THE FINAL FABRIC.



ABOVE: DESIGN DRAWINGS AND FABRIC SAMPLES FOR THE CHARACTERS OF BEATRICE AND EDDIE.

The history of such a well-known play as *View* is hard to ignore and there are several iconic visuals, such as Eddie Carbone in a white singlet and worker's trousers that have a very strong impact. I wanted the audience to be able to see our version of Eddie Carbone, still dressed in equally identifiable working class attire, and connect him to those previous designs while still feeling 'fresh'. I used elements of traditional menswear such as denim, leather and watchcap beanies to give a sense of history and practicality, while mixing in more modern items to update the looks. Luckily, blue jeans, chore coats and button up flannel shirts are still part of fashion today so they were an easy way to transcend history. For Rodolpho, I wanted him to fully embrace his New York life and interest in fashion. He still wears jeans, but they are black and of a much slimmer cut than Eddie's. He also has a pair of boots that are not only practical, but stylish, a fact that Eddie considers a mark against his character. These fashionable items, as well as the velvet-embossed jacket Rodolpho wears for his wedding, were sourced from retail stores during the production period. The battered workwear worn by other characters was sourced from our costume store or op shops, as their previous life would only help to give them a feeling of age and authenticity.

Once I had produced the final design drawings it was time for the rest of the company, as well as the actors, to see them. These drawings are what the wardrobe department uses to determine what elements of the costume to source, buy or make in-house. I tried to include as much information as I could about colour, fabric, style lines and fit. If I had chosen a particular fabric for a costume, I attached a swatch for reference so that the wardrobe supervisor could fit the cost of the fabric into the budget. Even at this stage the design is not set in stone.

There are constant conversations between the various departments to nudge the production into a final cohesive image. Costume fittings are held with the actors, the designer, the director and the wardrobe staff to try on and discuss the costumes in progress. While the cutters and wardrobe supervisor work to refine the fit of the costume being made, the actor has a chance to feel how the clothes fit and decide how they will work with the actions they are doing on stage. Changes to the design are still possible in the first fittings, and throughout the production and rehearsal period many things might happen that can change the final look of a costume.

I had designed for Rodopho to wear a black felt hat, as a nod to the hats worn by most men in the 1950's but also as a symbol of his new-found identity as a fashionable New Yorker. However, during rehearsals it became apparent that the hat just ended up obscuring the actor's face. The minimalist nature of the set also added to the dilemma, as there was nowhere to comfortably remove and place the hat when actors moved 'inside'. So it was cut. Shoes with high heels that looked good on paper turned out to be too precarious to wear on an uneven stage, and a dress that was too restrictive to allow the actor to climb safely around the box set was changed. Decisions like these are made all the time, and in the end the effect has to serve the vision of the play.

By the time the curtain rises on opening night, some costume designs will look identical to those initial drawings and some will look quite different. What the audience gets to see on stage is the end result of many months of collaboration.

