



CREATING *the* LOOK



Production designers are responsible for the overall look of a film, including decisions about overall style, set design and construction, location selection, and set decoration. Many production designers begin their careers studying architecture or theater design. Understanding fundamental design concepts, such as an architect might learn, is vital to effective art direction. Along with the basic shape, designers must decide on the volume, or size, of their space, as well as its depth. The designer must also decide if the space is going to be realistic or stylized. In the movie *Babe*, for example, hyper-realistic spaces were used to enhance the fairytale quality of the story. As with a painting, a set's depth can be enhanced through perspective. Adding windows and doors, for instance, can increase the sense of depth. Scale (or the relative size of objects) can be manipulated for emotional effect. In *The Secret Garden*, Stuart Craig made the mansion sets huge in proportion to the girl to emphasize her feeling of powerlessness. Production designers

also consider how the camera is going to be used in a given set or location. Is the camera going to be moving all through the space at eye level, for instance, or looking down at a single, fixed angle? How will the set or location be lit? Natural light from the west? Artificial overhead light?

From a magazine, book or the Internet, select a photograph or painting that contains a room that is visually striking. Consider the following questions: What is the first thing you notice about the room? What is its overall shape and size? Are the elements within the space in proportion to one another? Is the space shallow or deep? If there are windows and doors, how do they function in the set? Basically, how does the space help the filmmaker tell the story?

Name or general description of painting or photograph: _____

Where is the camera in the scene? _____

Artist: _____

Is it moving or fixed? _____

Describe the architectural elements of the room—shape, volume, scale, depth—and suggest how they work together to create a feeling about the space:

Do you think that the scene was set in a real location or a space constructed for the film? Why?

Pick an indoor scene from a film that was recognized for achievement in art direction. As you watch the scene, try to focus on the architectural elements of the art direction and their relation to the camera.

Now imagine the scene in a different setting. Describe the new architectural elements:

Title of film: _____

The scene I will observe is:

How do your changes affect the way the camera moves in the scene?

Describe the set's architectural elements:

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF SET DESIGN

PERSPECTIVE: The way things look from a given point according to their size, shape, distance, etc.

SCALE: The apparent size of a represented object in proportion to the actual size of that object

VOLUME: The amount of space inside something