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Scenic Design for Alan Ayckbourn's *Taking Steps*

David Adkins

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SCENIC DESIGN FOR ALAN AYCKBOURN'S

TAKING STEPS

By

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B.A. University of Maine, 1995

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in Theatre)

The Graduate School

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May, 2003

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By David A. Adkins

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Tom Mikotowicz

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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A theatrical scene designer is responsible for creating the physical space in which a play takes place. This is accomplished through reading and analyzing the script, researching materials related to the production, discussions with the director, and collaboration with other designers. This thesis focused on the process involved in designing a set, as described by J. Michael Gillette in his book, Theatrical Design and Production, (Third Edition) and how that process was applied to Alan Ayckbourn's farce *Taking Steps*. The play provided a unique educational challenge for a scenic designer, as it requires that three floors of a house be designed, built, and represented on one stage level. Consequently, a design was created and six performances of the play were presented by the Maine Masque between April 18, and April 22, 2001, in Hauck Auditorium at the University of Maine.

This thesis is organized into an introduction, three chapters, a bibliography, and appendixes. The Introduction begins the thesis by defining the scope of the project and giving a first look at the Gillette Design Process. Chapter One provides background material on Alan Ayckbourn, information about farce as a theatrical style, and basic data on the play *Taking Steps*. Chapter Two documents seven of the

eight Gillette design process steps: Commitment, Analysis, a Questioning Process, Research, Incubation, Selection, and Implementation. This begins with accepting the design project, continues through the creation of the design, and concludes with the completion of a set on the stage. The eighth step, Evaluation, is included in Chapter Three along with a conclusion. The Evaluation will cover both the design process and the design as an educational project.

In conclusion, the production was well received and the setting provided an effective environment for the actors. A number of design challenges provided excellent educational opportunities, not the least of which was an unexpected need to relocate the audience and to design custom audience seating. Through this process, it was discovered that designers always need to improve ways to visually communicate design ideas and be able to accomplish more in-depth analysis. Despite the overall success of this production, however, more work in those areas will take my designs to another level and, hopefully, increase the chances for consistent success.

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INTRODUCTION

Designing the set for *Taking Steps* fulfilled two needs: it served as an educational project for a creative thesis, and it provided an opportunity to work on another set design. *Taking Steps*, by Alan Ayckbourn, had been chosen by the University of Maine student theater organization, Maine Masque, as their 2001 performance. A fellow graduate student was directing the play and her description of the script, and its unique setting requirements, introduced an exciting scenic design challenge. The play is set in a three-story house, but the author has written into the script that all floors are to be designed and built on the same stage level. To accomplish this, the actors mime walking up and down flat staircases and while they are in different rooms on different floors of the house, they often stand directly next to each other. (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Roland shouting down the first floor hall with Elizabeth hiding on the staircase landing.

There are numerous ways to approach a design and this production made use of a design process documented in J. Michael Gillette's book, Theatrical Design and Production, (Third Edition). Gillette breaks down his design process into eight parts: Commitment, Analysis, a Questioning Process, Research, Incubation, Selection, Implementation, and an Evaluation. The process begins with a commitment to the design, which affirms that the designer will do his or her best work. Work begins with Analysis and the Questioning Process. This includes analyzing the script, talking to the director and other designers, and gathering as much information about the script and characters as possible. The next step is Research, in which the designer looks at books, art, magazines, and anything that might provide a glimpse into the background of the play. This can include many things, from the history of a specific place and period in time, to pictures of furnishings similar to those called for in the script. Research is followed by an important, but often overlooked, Incubation period. This is a time when the designer concentrates on other things and the information in his or her head is pushed out of conscious thought. This time away from the show actually allows the subconscious mind to process the gathered information and later makes it easier to form new ideas. That is when the selection process begins. The raw information is honed into accurate thoughts that are then transformed into the set design. Since there are countless different ways to design a set, care has to be taken to proceed at a steady pace to the Implementation phase in which the designer stops trying out new ideas, makes choices and begins to physically convert those into a set design. Implementation includes both the creation of the design drawings and then the creation of the set. The last step is an Evaluation of the

design process, leading to the questions: What worked well and what didn't? What can be taken from this design process that will aid in the process for future designs?

This production of ***Taking Steps*** turned out to be a much larger challenge than was first apparent. It was discovered, after the fact, that the play was originally intended to be performed in-the-round. Yet, it had been scheduled into a proscenium style theater. After many attempts to make the design fit on a proscenium stage, this eventually led to the audience being moved on to the stage to allow for a three-quarter round setting. That choice not only required a re-design of the set, but also created a need to design seating units for the audience, which led to additional research into audience safety. The setting itself was not complex, but parts of the construction involved tedious work, careful planning, and time management. Construction procedures for a custom front door, and a multi-step painting process, provided two major learning opportunities.

This thesis will document the Gillette design process from the initial reading of the script to a final examination of the work. Chapter One will include background on Alan Ayckbourn, a description of farce, and information about Ayckbourn's play ***Taking Steps***. Chapter Two will include what happened during the first seven of Gillette's eight design process steps: Commitment, Analysis, a Questioning Process, Research, Incubation, Selection, and Implementation. Chapter Three will conclude with step eight of Gillette's design process, Evaluation, and a Conclusion, followed by a Bibliography, and Appendixes of pertinent drawings, and research materials.

CHAPTER ONE:

BACKGROUND ON ALAN AYCKBOURN AND *TAKING STEPS*

Before beginning to design a show, a designer should gather information about the play itself, and the playwright. What type of play is it? What is the playwright trying to say with the script? Is there information about the playwright that can help in understanding the script?

The author of *Taking Steps*, Alan Ayckbourn, was born on April 12, 1939, in Hampstead England. His parents both had an artistic background, one in music and one in writing, which infused him with an interest in the arts. Ayckbourn's interest in playwriting was sparked at Haileybury, a public school in England, where he wrote the house play every year he was there. After school, Ayckbourn started work as an assistant stage manager, worked his way up to stage managing, and then eventually acting. In 1957, he became a member of the company at Stephen Joseph's Theater-In-The-Round in Scarborough. Unhappy with the roles he was getting, Ayckbourn complained to Mr. Joseph, and was told, "If you want a better part, you'd better write one for yourself...I'll do it. If it's any good" (Billington 4). So in 1959, Ayckbourn wrote *The Square Cat* under the pen name of Roland Allen. Ayckbourn is known for his ability to write farce, and in addition to writing unique plays for theater in-the-round, he has a talent for creating plays with unique settings. His play *Way Upstream* takes place on a boat in actual water and *Bedroom Farce* shows the audience three different bedrooms at the same time. Thus, it is no surprise that

Taking Steps has a unique setting where three floors of a house are combined on to one stage level.

Farce can be loosely defined as “A light dramatic work in which highly improbable plot situations, exaggerated characters, and often slapstick elements are used for humorous effect.” (dictionary.com). Michael Billington’s book Alan Ayckbourn Second Edition, however, provides a more detailed description of farce by John Mortimer:

“The world of farce is necessarily square, solid, respectable and totally sure of itself: only so can it be exploded. There is nothing comical about a trembling masochist being kicked on the behind or a sprightly and permissive collection of Swedish teenagers being caught in the wrong bedroom. These events must occur only to the most dignified and moral persons. It is impossible to be funny about funny people.” (Billington 139).

In *Taking Steps*, the characters are relatively normal people, a manufacturer, a junior partner in a law firm, and a former dancer, to name a few. Farce comes in to play when one sees ordinary people put in extraordinary and unusual situations. For example, the manufacturer gets dragged around, half-unconscious, by two men wearing identical pairs of his pajamas, the junior partner finds himself in bed with his client’s wife thinking she is the house ghost, and the former dancer ends up with the owner of the house in a headlock, with her strong dancer’s legs, because she thinks he is a burglar.

Billington, in listing the numerous ways the unique setting is used, says, “The house itself thus becomes a character in the farce” (Billington 141). Farces often involve many doors behind which one character narrowly misses discovering another character. *Taking Steps*, with its unique stage setting, replaces the use of doors with

stairs that are painted flat on the floor and rooms from different floors of the house that overlap and border each other. A character can be in a room that in reality would be directly above another room and on the set they are standing directly next to a person in the room below.

Numerous reviews can be found describing various productions of *Taking Steps*. A majority of material is dedicated to the plot, but there are also various insights into the script. Sidney White, in his book Alan Ayckbourn, described how important movement is to a farce and how Ayckbourn's "three-floors-in-one-set" concept is hilarious entertainment. Although, White documents how some critics felt the play contained too many farcical devices and that it loses momentum. (White 126). Albert Kalson, in his book Laughter in the Dark. The Plays of Alan Ayckbourn, describes how Ayckbourn's passive characters can win out in the end. In *Taking Steps*, Kalson is referring to Tristram, who through most of the play is timid and bumbling, and to Kitty, who is too confused to stand up for what she wants. He describes how at the end of the play they have not only found each other, but have found strength in each other. To prove his case about Tristram and Kitty, Kalson quotes Ayckbourn as saying "*Taking Steps* is a 'play about innocence ... and freedom' that 'proposes the probably naive and certainly unfashionable view that good will triumph'" (Kalson 129).

Many of the reviews were positive, describing how funny the productions were and how interesting the unique setting was. One review though had quite an opposite point of view. David Hogg and Robin Kullberg, in an online newspaper called The Tech, reviewed a performance of *Taking Steps* at the Lyric Theatre,

London, in 1990. While they described the acting as competent and felt that there were funny moments to the play they are quoted as saying:

“but it seems to hold the opinion that humor cannot be used to convey a serious theme or idea. The play is designed for an audience that wants to be entertained, but no more. Rather than pay \$15 to see ***Taking Steps***, our readers would be well advised to watch a few hours of prime-time television any weeknight: They may lose the experience of live performance by a competent company, but they will get all the humor and just as much insight.” (Hogg and Kulberg).

After having gathered information about Alan Ayckbourn, the play ***Taking Steps***, and the nature of farce, it was time to begin the design process.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE GILLETTE DESIGN PROCESS

Commitment

In J. Michael Gillette's book, Theatrical Design and Production, (Third Edition) Gillette details a process for theatrical design (Gillette 17). The first step in the process is Commitment to the project. It may seem obvious that when one starts working on a design there is a commitment to it, but this is an important step. As Gillette puts it, "you are promising yourself that you will do the best work you can possibly do" (Gillette 17).

Analysis

Following Commitment is Analysis, which includes an analysis of the script and a questioning process. In his book, Gillette explains that while a designer will read a script numerous times, the acquired information can be put into three categories, which he describes as the "first three readings" (Gillette 19). The first reading is intended to be for fun and not to gather any specific information. The second reading is meant to gather impressions of how the play makes you feel and to describe those feelings through descriptive words, such as hot or gloomy, or through sketches. In the third reading, the designer gathers specific mechanical information, such as the number of doors or any special set pieces that are called for in the script.

When first reading Alan Ayckbourn's script ***Taking Steps***, it seems rather drawn out and difficult to imagine. There are numerous character interactions and staging directions that take time to process in the mind. While the script takes time and effort to read, those same character interactions and stage directions are easier to

process while watching, and are essential to the production's sense of pace. Scripts, after all, are intended to be performed and not read. *Taking Steps* is clearly a farce with the characters being placed in plenty of unlikely and compromising situations for the comedic enjoyment of the audience. One reason that the characters in *Taking Steps* are so comical is that they are all normal people put in extraordinary situations. Aside from a few odd quirks, any of the characters in *Taking Steps*, could also be put into a serious script or a tragedy. I came away from the first reading excited about how funny this play was going to be and how the set was going to support the humor.

The primary visual impression gathered from the second reading was that of the spooky house in the Addams Family television series and films. (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Addams Family House from the Television Show.



Figure 3. Addams Family House from the first Addams Family Movie.

While that exact setting was not practical for Ayckbourn's script, the Addams Family house did bring to mind a successful joining of comedy and the supernatural, which related to the farcical nature of *Taking Steps* and the supernatural element of the ghost Scarlet Lucy. Roland, together with Elizabeth Crabbe, who are potential buyers of *The Pines*, are renting and living in the house. Because the Crabbes do not yet own *The Pines*, the house would retain its Victorian architecture, but have simple modern furniture not becoming of such a wealthy couple. In fact, Leslie Bainbridge, the current owner of the house, would have been the one to provide the furnishings and he would have put as little money as possible into that task. There would be a few personal belongings to make the house a home, but the majority of "personalizing" would take place after the investment was made to purchase the house. Overall, I felt the setting should be light and warm to enhance the good feelings associated with a comedy, but felt it appropriate to have a slight undertone of something darker to represent Elizabeth seeing the house as a prison. The script refers to the color brown for most of the second floor, but those colors could be kept

on the lighter or warmer side. Openness came to mind, with sections of walls representing rooms, rather than a full, heavy, realistic setting.

As mentioned previously, Gillette's third reading is meant to gather specific mechanical information about the scenic requirements. *Taking Steps* has a single stage setting that requires no set changes. Although there are three distinct floors in the house, they are all visually represented as a one level set. The stage description included in the script of *Taking Steps*:

“Scene: The Pines. About 6 p.m. on a cold Friday evening in February. The Pines is a fairly large Victorian manor house of no great beauty or distinction. At ground floor level, our view of the house is dominated by a lounge. This is a fairly big room with two doors leading off it; one to an inner sanctum, the study; the other to the main hall and grand staircase. The hall itself also leads to the front door of the house, and the other way, to the kitchen and presumably a dining-room. The lounge is furnished comfortably without any great style. There is an impression of age. An armchair or so, a sofa and a small table. All in all, it suggests what it is, a rented partly furnished house. Up the main staircase, the visible first-floor area contains, principally, the master bedroom situated immediately above the lounge. This contains a double bed, bedside tables, a dressing-table with stool and at least one single upright chair. Again there are two doors; the main one leading off the landing, fairly near the top of the stairs; the other to the bedroom's own private bathroom. The landing itself leads away to the other bedrooms on the first floor unseen by us. In view, though, is a second much narrower staircase which leads to the attic floor. Our view at this level is primarily of a small low-ceilinged “servants” bedroom containing a tiny single bed, a plain bedside table with a battered table lamp and an ancient wooden chair. There is a skylight window near the bed and an overhead light that doesn't work. The bed is unmade. In the corner of the room is a cupboard, housing at the top the cold water tank for the house. The attic bedroom has only one doorway leading on to its own second floor landing from the stairs. Again, the landing leads away out of view to other attic bedrooms and to an upstairs bathroom.

Three floors, then, linked by two flights of stairs; but to simplify-or perhaps to complicate-matters, all floors are at the same level. The stairs though marked with sloping handrails and rodded stair carpets are flat and only give the impression of leading upwards. The furniture for each room therefore occupies the same area of stage

or possibly an area diminishing in size the higher we go. Certainly the areas should and must overlap and each set of furniture kept separate and to a minimum. Individual levels when used separately can be defined by their own styles and, of course, by lighting. The lounge and master bedroom can have one or two practical fittings to help this.”

As with any notes contained in a script, some are important to the action in the play and others are merely a documentation of what was done the first time the script was performed. It is a designer’s job to sort through the notes and determine what should stay and what can be changed. For this design, the second staircase was made into a spiral staircase, there were no rodged carpets on the first staircase, and the rooms did not overlap. Otherwise, everything mentioned in the script’s stage description was put into the design.

Questioning Process

Gillette’s Questioning Process involves talking to the director, other designers, and anyone and everyone involved in the production to gather as much information as possible. In initial meetings, the director really only had two requests. The first was that the actors’ feet could be seen as much as possible. With all three floors of the house being combined onto one level of the stage, the director felt seeing the actors’ feet would help to distinguish where they were in the house, especially when going up and down the staircases, which would actually be flat. The second request was that Kitty be visible while trapped in the attic closet. While Kitty spends a large portion of the play trapped inside the attic closet, she is still reacting to what is happening in the attic bedroom. By making her visible, the audience would be able to see her reactions and get more insight into her character. Aside from production

meetings and some sharing of color choices, there was not much interaction amongst the designers.

Research

The next step in Gillette's design process is Research. As mentioned earlier, the house is old, but the setting is modern, so the research was focused on Victorian architectural elements and not on furnishings. Research on Victorian architecture was from a combination of stylebooks with photos and books of Victorian art. The Victorian art was useful in developing an overall feeling for what the period was like, but it did not provide many practical examples that could be borrowed for the set.

One incredibly useful book was The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Victoriana: A Comprehensive Guide to the Designs, Customs, and Inventions of the Victorian Era by Ruhling and Freeman. This book contained a number of excellent photos and descriptions of everything Victorian from Abbotsford to Wootton desks. There were great examples of doors, moldings, floors, and stairs that were easy to incorporate as design elements. (Figures 4 and 5).



Figure 4. Sample of a main staircase.



Figure 5. Sample on which the custom front door was based.

Another very good source was The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details from 1485 to Present by Calloway and Cromley. The book is divided into different time periods, of which British Victorian 1837-1901 and American Victorian 1840-1910 were extremely helpful. This book offered specific examples of doors, windows, walls, ceilings, floors, fireplaces, stoves, staircases, furniture, services, lighting, and woodwork from each period. (Figures 6, 7, and 8).

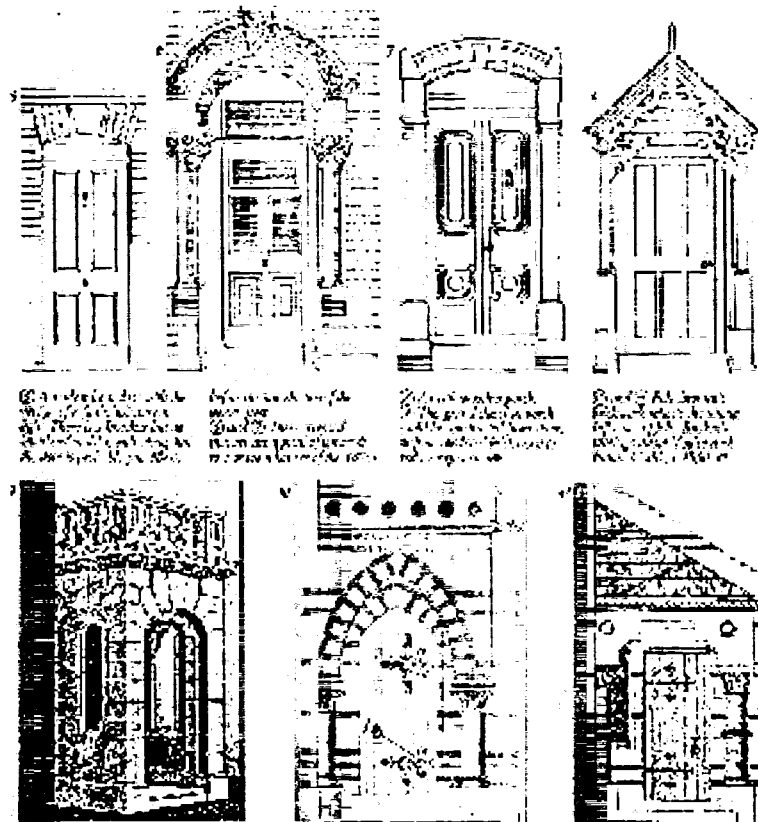


Figure 6. Sample Victorian doors.

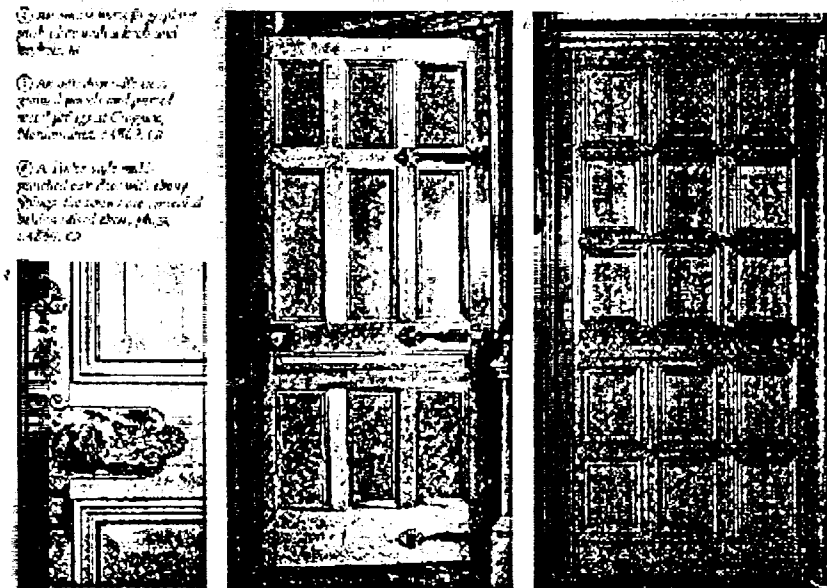


Figure 7. Sample doors on which the custom study doors were based.

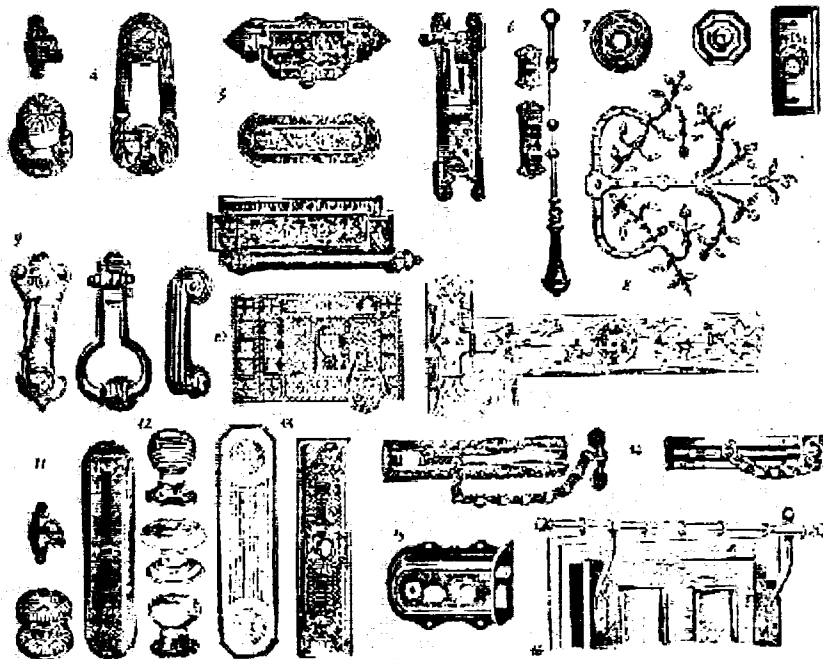


Figure 8. Sample Victorian door hardware.

Research also included a look at the characters in the play, which are described below:

Elizabeth Crabbe - Elizabeth, in her early thirties, fancies herself a great ballet dancer, but is out of shape and in truth was never a very good dancer. She met her husband while dancing in a television commercial for his bucket company. She desires freedom from her married life, wishing to return to dancing. Despite her best efforts she cannot seem to follow through.

Mark – Mark, in his mid to late thirties, is Elizabeth's brother. He works as a personnel manager, but has a life dream to open a fishing shop, for which he hopes Roland will give him a startup loan. He was recently engaged to a woman named Kitty, who left him at the altar. Mark thinks Kitty shares his dreams, but is not observant enough to realize she has different dreams. He also has a habit of putting people to sleep with his droning conversations.

Tristram Watson – Tristram is a junior partner in the law firm of Speak, Tacket, and Winthrop. Mr. Winthrop was supposed to attend a meeting with Elizabeth's husband, but fell ill and sent Tristram in his place. Tristram, at twenty-five, is an eager, happy solicitor, but is a little out of sorts around people and easily startled. When he gets nervous, he tends to speak a confusing language of mixed up words and thoughts.

Roland Crabbe – Roland, in his mid-forties, is a bullish and wealthy man who drinks quite heavily. Born in Singapore, Roland continues the bucket manufacturing business his father started. He dotes on his wife Elizabeth, but makes no effort to understand her. Roland and Elizabeth have been living in a large Victorian manor house, which they have been leasing from Leslie Bainbridge. Roland is in the process

of purchasing the house for Elizabeth, but he is oblivious to the fact that she sees the house as a prison.

Leslie Bainbridge – Leslie is an energetic, humorous builder, in his late thirties, who is selling the Victorian manor house for his family. While he is friendly, his intentions are to sell Mr. Crabbe the house and he does not have the Crabbe's best interest in mind. He rides a motorcycle and appears in full gear, with helmet, goggles and leather jacket.

Kitty – Kitty, in her late twenties, is Mark's fiancée. After leaving Mark at the altar to find freedom with a waiter, she was arrested for suspected solicitation and sent back home. Mark is attempting to patch things up with her, but Kitty is confused about her own desires and does not share Mark's dreams of a life running a fishing shop.

Incubation

Gillette next recommends an Incubation period before starting any actual design work. This allows a designer to properly absorb all of the material gathered during research and to work on it in their subconscious mind. During this period, a designer should work on other things and try not to think about the show at all. Later when the designer starts the process of Selection, selecting the different components that will make up the design, they will be able to transform the various research materials into a design of their own much easier than if they had jumped right into Selection. For this production, there was not a lot of time available to devote to the Incubation period.

Selection

In Gillette's Selection process, a designer begins to put together the materials gathered during research with the ideas that have "hatched" during the Incubation period. This is also the time when ideas are shared with the other designers in the production, such as the lighting and costume designers. On a broad level, this is done to insure that the director's concept for the production is unified among all the areas of design. On a more practical level, this sharing also avoids conflicting design elements, like a wall that would block lights, or design colors that might clash with each other. To share these ideas, a designer will draw sketches, create models, and make color renderings. (Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. A working model of the *Taking Steps* set.



Figure 10. Grayscale copy of the *Taking Steps* color rendering.

These tools allow others to visualize what the finished design might look like and how it will interact with the other design elements. With Computer Aided Design (CAD) technology, a designer can make real time three-dimensional changes, which is an incredibly quick way to try out new ideas or solutions to existing problems.

Ayckbourn originally wrote *Taking Steps* to be performed theatre-in-the-round style. “Behind the proscenium arch, *Taking Steps* never worked quite as well as it did in-the-round in Scarborough, where the audience’s laughter on the first night added seventeen minutes to the play’s running time” (Kalson 68). That fact was discovered during the Research phase, but this particular production had been scheduled, almost a year earlier, into Hauck auditorium, a proscenium style theater. (Figure 11).

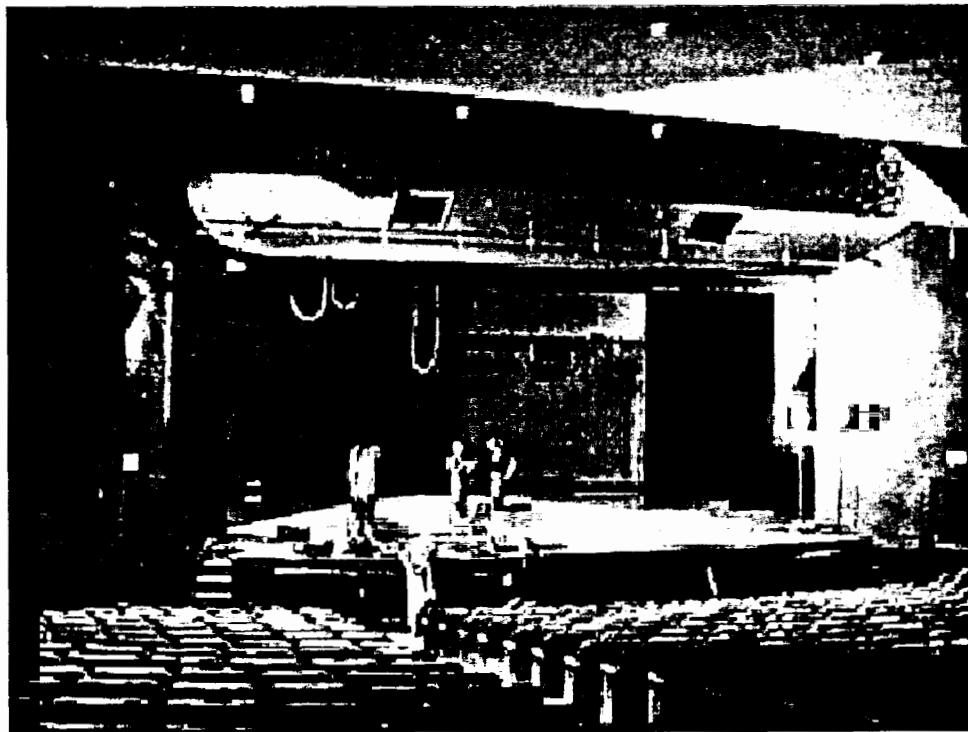


Figure 11. The proscenium arch of Hauck stage.

There was a three-quarter round theater on campus that would have provided excellent sight lines for the audience, but moving the production to another space was not an option. Initial efforts to fit the setting on the proscenium stage exposed two major challenges. First, seating in the theater was not raked high enough to allow the audience to see the stage floor very well. This made it especially difficult to see the staircases, which were painted, flat on the stage floor. (Figures 12 and 13).

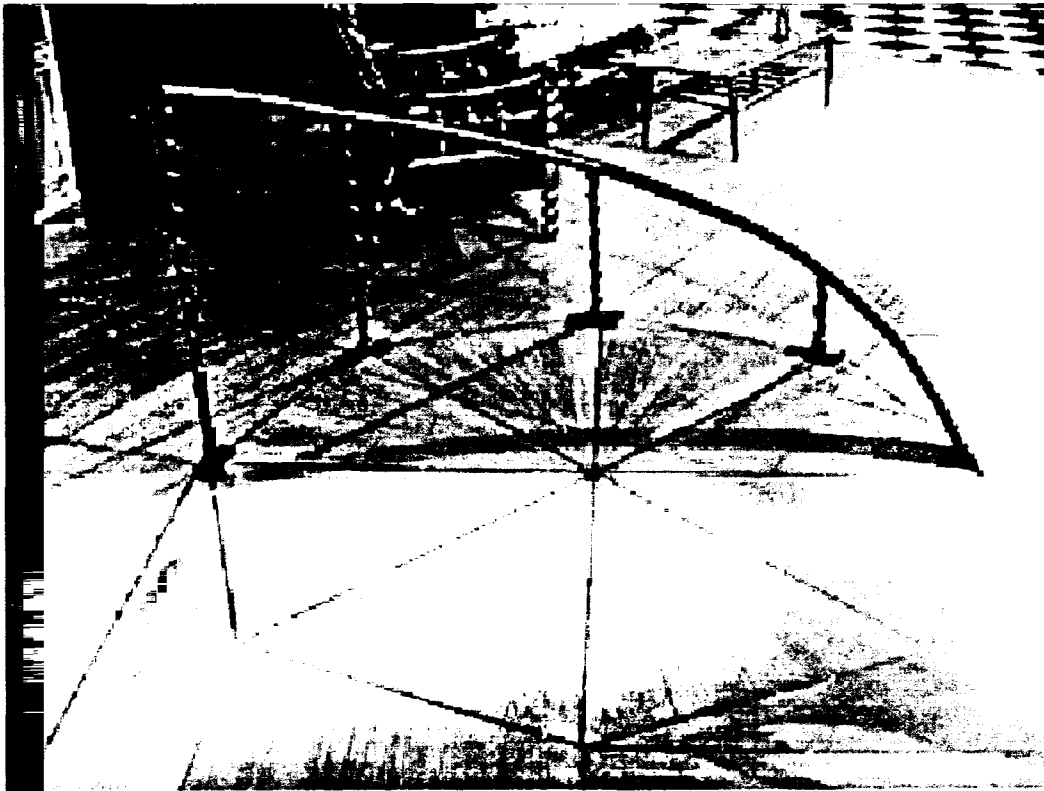


Figure 12. Spiral staircase connecting the second floor and the attic floor.

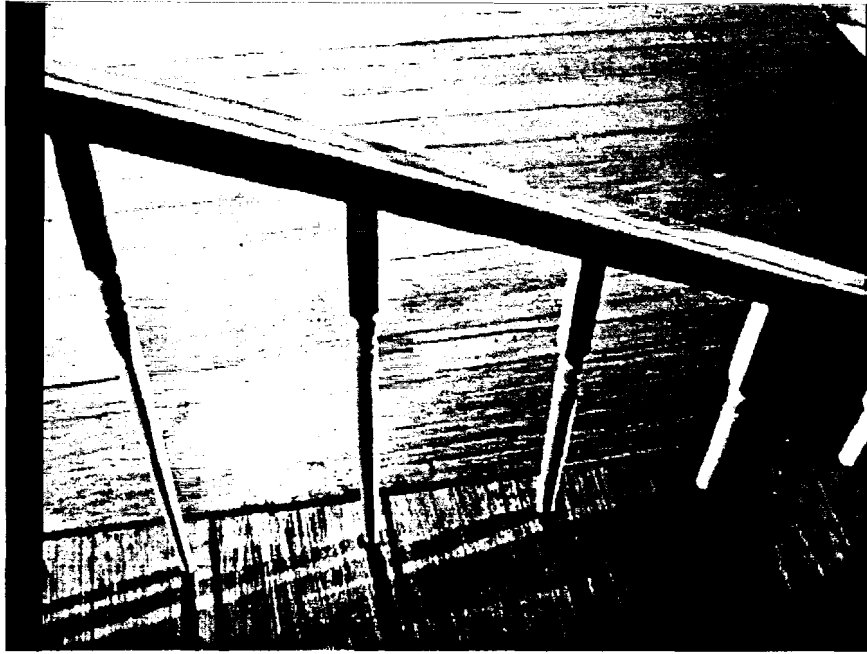


Figure 13. Staircase railing disappearing into the floor.

The second challenge was the narrow proscenium opening, thirty-six feet wide by eighteen feet high. Seeing the stage from such a shallow angle can cause downstage scenic elements to block the view of upstage elements. A poorly placed sofa could block major action upstage. This often forces design elements to be put side by side preventing the use of much depth on the stage, which would be beneficial in trying to represent three separate floors all on the same level within a narrow proscenium opening. In an effort to solve these two challenges, shallow seating and narrow proscenium opening, initial floor plans tried to position the various spaces in the house diagonally and slightly overlapping. This was the most efficient use of the narrow space in the proscenium opening, but by no means did it solve all the sight line problems.

There was also a need to satisfy the director's two main requests, being able to see the actor's feet and being able to see Kitty when she is trapped in the attic closet. Being able to see the actor's feet was complicated by the difficulty of placing the two staircases in clear view of the audience, but not having the sloped stair rails block other scenic elements. An adequate solution was to orient the stairs to run up and downstage so the profile of the railings blocked less than if they ran side to side. The solution for seeing Kitty while trapped in the closet was much easier to solve. Theatrical scrim is a fabric with an open weave that appears opaque when lit from the front, even when painted, and can be seen through when the area behind it is lit. By creating a flat made of scrim, the actor/character could be seen through the wall. Flats are traditionally made of wood, but it was decided that a steel frame would be ideal in this situation. Thin square steel tubing would allow for more scrim area to be seen through while at the same time providing a more sturdy flat, reducing the amount of shaking caused by Kitty trying to get out of the closet.

As the Selection phase was coming to a close, a floor plan had been created that solved many of the scenic challenges, but was far from ideal. At that point, a professor in the theater department recommended an excellent suggestion. The idea was to move the audience on to the stage where seating could be built with better sight lines. Hauck stage was too small to install seating all around the set and still have room for the set itself, but there was enough room to put seating on the sides and in the back of the stage, essentially turning it into a three-quarter round theater. This configuration allowed for improved sight lines both vertically and horizontally. This idea was introduced early enough so there was still time to re-design the set with the

new audience orientation. There was also a large supply of “stock” four-foot by eight-foot platforms in the department that could be used for the majority of the audience seating risers, reducing extra costs associated with the new plan to within the available budget. After showing the director initial ideas for how the floor plan would look with the audience on Hauck stage, the director took a few days to think about how the new setting would affect blocking before deciding to go ahead with the new design.

After making the decision to relocate the audience to the stage, it was not difficult to modify the floor plan. A black curtain was put up in the proscenium opening blocking the view of the traditional auditorium seats and providing a back wall for the new stage area, which was rectangular in shape. To aid in the openness of the setting, only partial walls were built for the doorways and archways, with just enough on either side to visually support the illusion of a wall, and literally support the construction. All future references to stage directions are in relation to the new orientation of the stage and the new audience seating, which is opposite of the traditional stage orientation in Hauck Auditorium. (Figure 14).

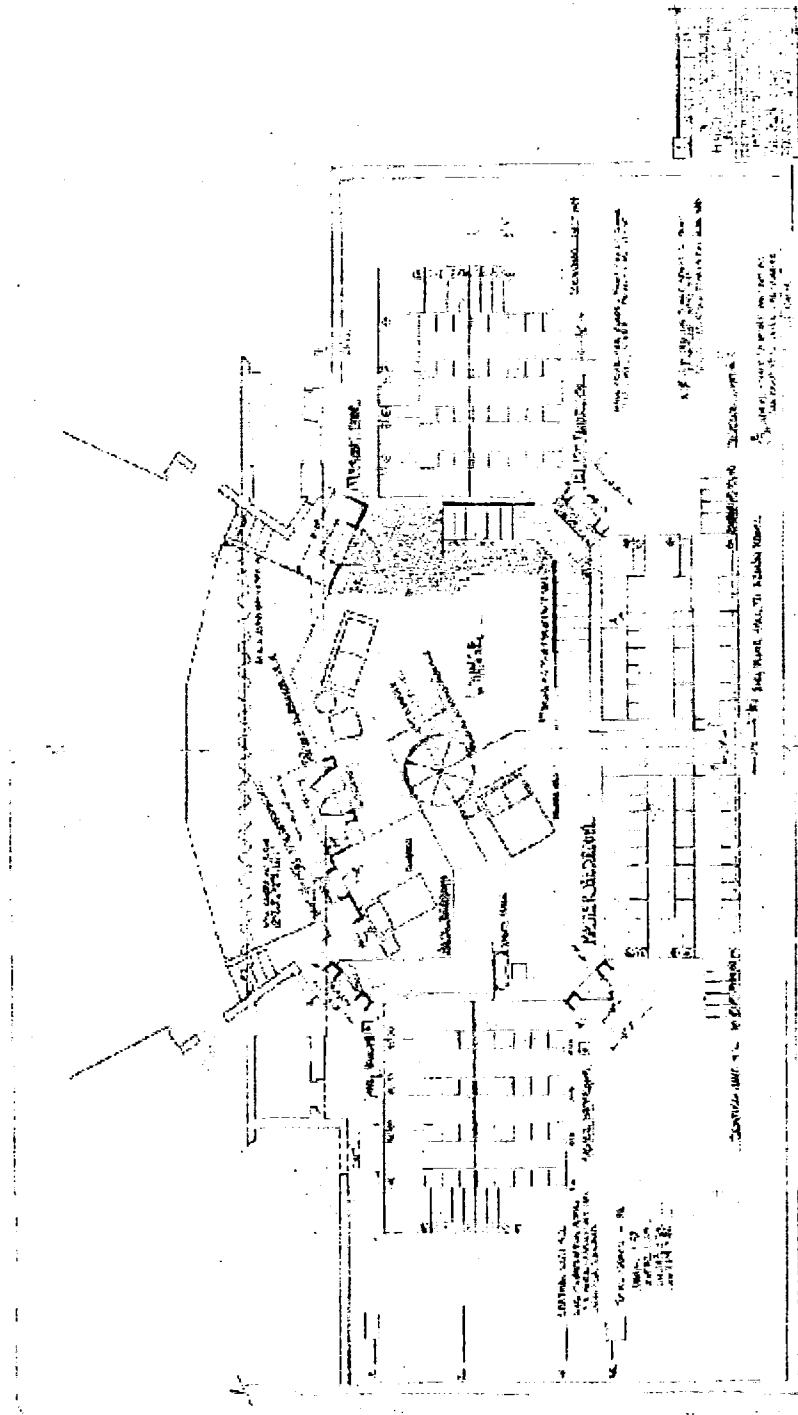


Figure 14. *Taking Steps* floor plan.

The front entrance of the house was placed in the upstage left corner entering on to a marble floor that continued downstage left to an archway leading offstage and implying the first floor hallway. (Figures 15 and 16).

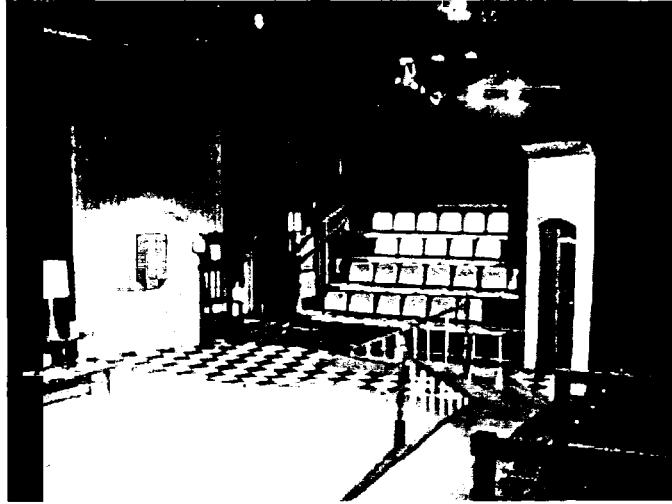


Figure 15. View of the front door (left) and front hall (right) flats.



Figure 16. First floor hallway flat.

The main staircase also occupied the downstage left corner, but was split into two sections with the first eight steps running along the stage left side, coming to a landing in the downstage left corner, with the remaining eight steps continuing on the downstage side. Off the entry way on the onstage side of the marble floor was an imaginary door that led to the lounge. The lounge space also included a study door, which was located upstage and left of center. (Figure 17).



Figure 17. The lounge showing the study door flat and spiral staircase.

Black masking was created behind the study doors to allow Roland to disappear when entering his study. At the top of the main staircase, there was a small landing with an imaginary master bedroom door located directly ahead, marked by small blocks on the floor representing the doorframe. (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Second floor hall flat (left), master bathroom flat (center) and master bedroom.

The second floor hall ran downstage and an archway was placed between two downstage sections of audience seating, so when the actors went down the second floor hall they would actually go behind the audience. (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Second floor hallway flat.

The upstage end of the hall led to a six-foot diameter spiral staircase, located just upstage of center stage. The spiral staircase led to the attic level and was visually placed in front of the study doors in the first floor lounge. The master bedroom occupied the downstage right quarter of the set with the door to the master bathroom located in the downstage right corner. Masking was also placed behind the bathroom door behind which the actors could change costumes. At the top of the spiral staircase, there was an imaginary door to the servant's bedroom, again marked by blocks on the floor representing the doorframe. The attic hall continued stage right to the edge of the stage and then turned upstage leading to an archway in the upstage right corner, which led off to the other attic rooms. The scrim flat with the closet door was placed upstage in the servant's bedroom mid-way between the study doors and the archway leading to the other attic rooms. (Figure 20).

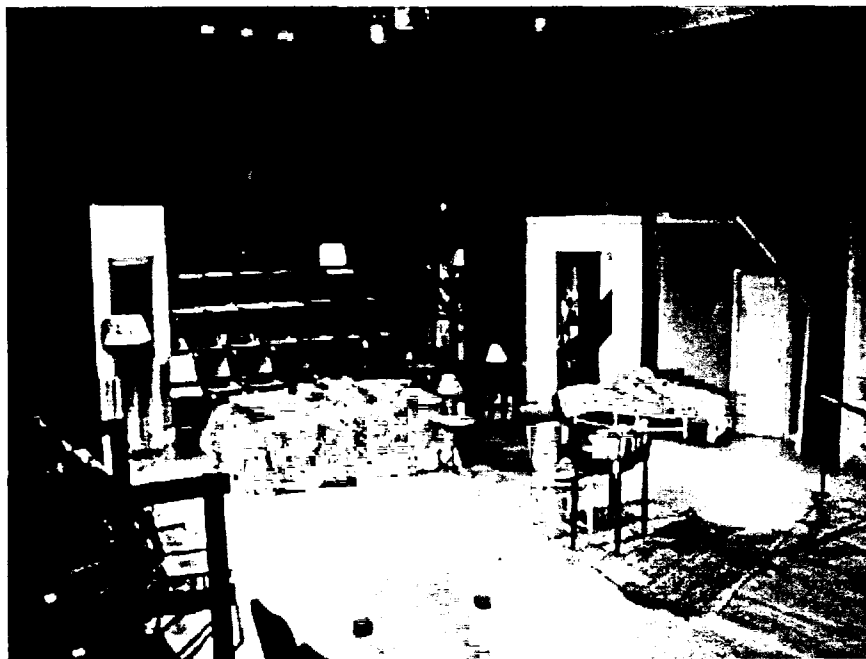


Figure 20. Master bedroom (left) and attic bedroom (right).

Except for the marble floor in the entryway, all of the floors were wood with the “painted floor” boards in each room run in a different direction to help the audience keep track of where one room or hallway ended and another one began. (Figures 21 and 22).

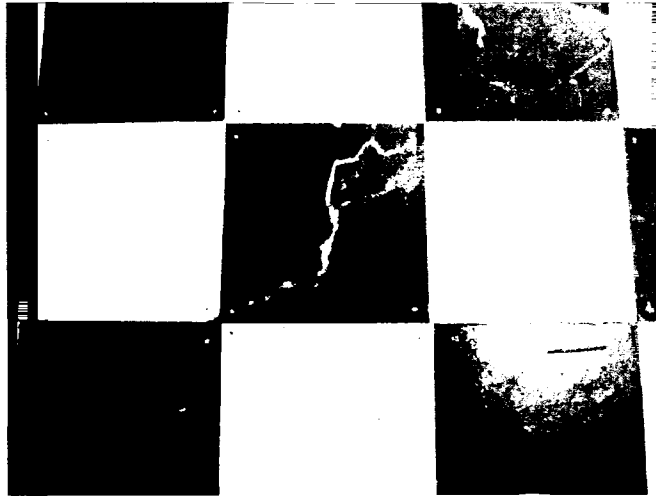


Figure 21. Painted marble tile floor.

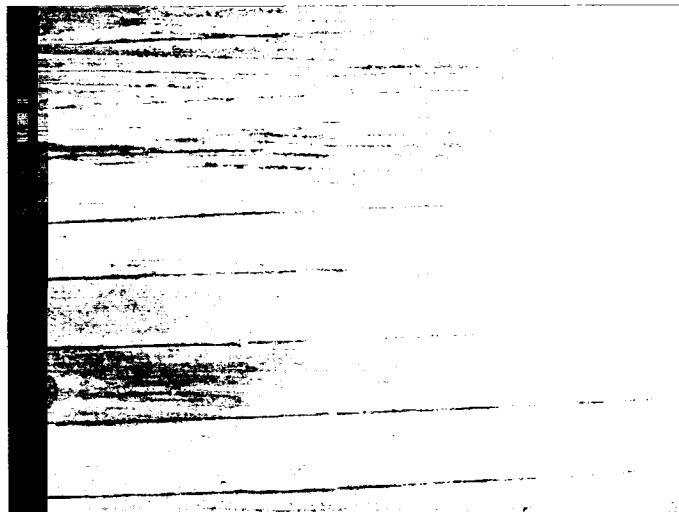


Figure 22. Painted wood floor.

Another concept to help distinguish spaces was to slightly change the color of the floorboards on each floor level to represent different kinds of wood.

In addition to the set, a design had to be made for the audience seating risers. (Figure 23).

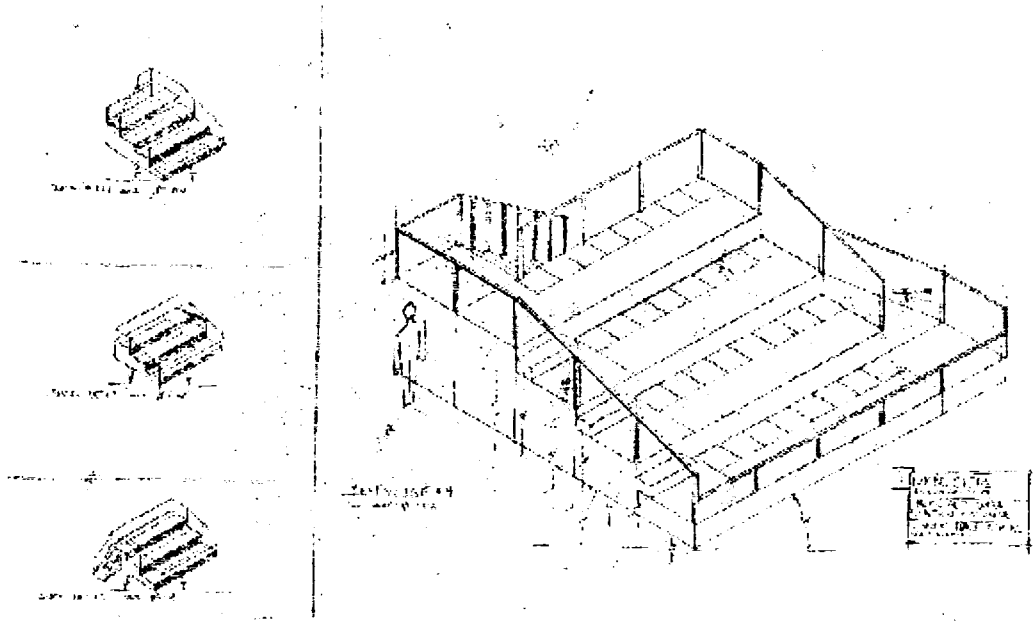


Figure 23. Detail drawing of audience seating units.

The height of the riser units was based on having two eight-inch steps up to each level, making each riser one foot and four inches above the last one, and allowing plenty of height to see over the person in front. Because there was a good deal of width to Hauck stage, the side units had four levels. There was not as much depth available on the stage so the downstage units, in relation to the new audience orientation, only had three levels. There were two downstage units, separated by the

second floor hall archway. A minimum of four feet was left between the downstage seating units and the back wall of the theater to allow for movement around the seating units. There was a large supply of music rehearsal chairs available within the department and after measurements were taken, it was determined that 112 of them would fit on the seating units. This was a much lower number than the 540 seats available in the traditional Hauck auditorium seating, but the benefits gained by the improved sight lines and more intimate seating outweighed the reduction in the number of people able to see the show at one time.

Implementation

Gillette describes Implementation as “when you stop planning and start doing” (Gillette 25). With the green light to proceed, finished drawings were made with details of each flat and details of how to build the seating units. (Figures 24, 25, and 26).

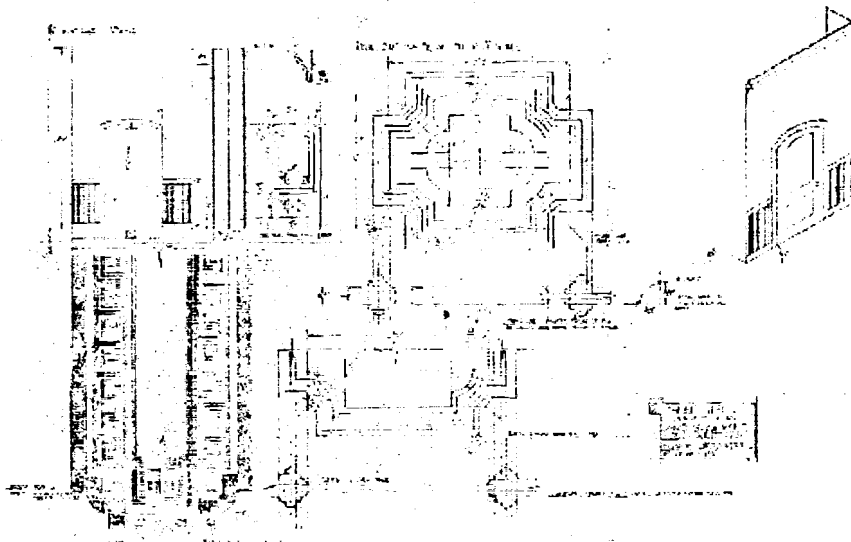


Figure 24. Detail drawing of front door flat, door beveling, and window frosting.

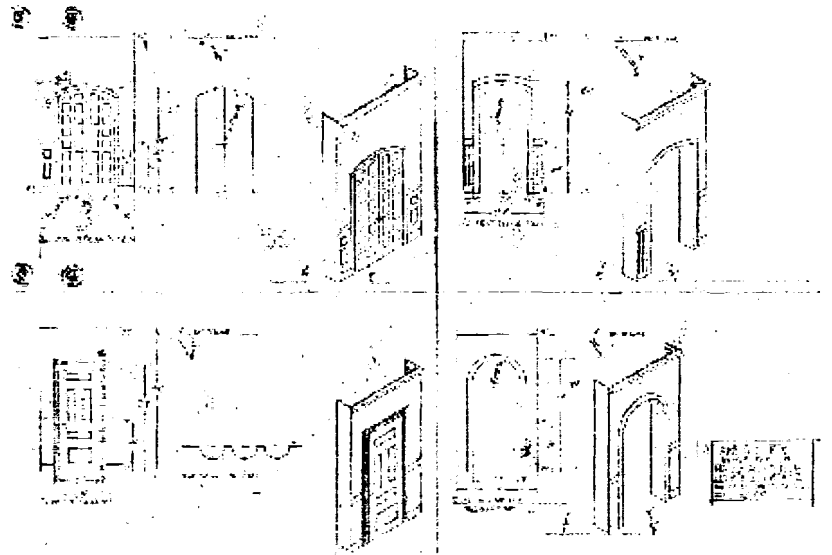


Figure 25. Detail drawing of study door flat, first floor hall flat, master bathroom flat, and second floor hall flat.

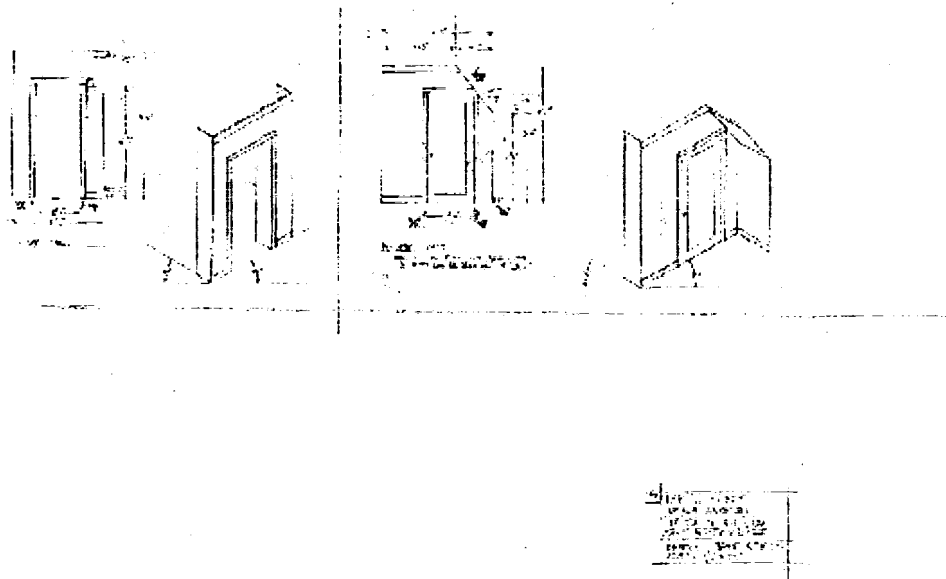


Figure 26. Detail drawing of attic hall flat, and attic bedroom closet flat.

A perspective drawing and a color rendering were also created to better show what the finished set would look like. (Figure 27).

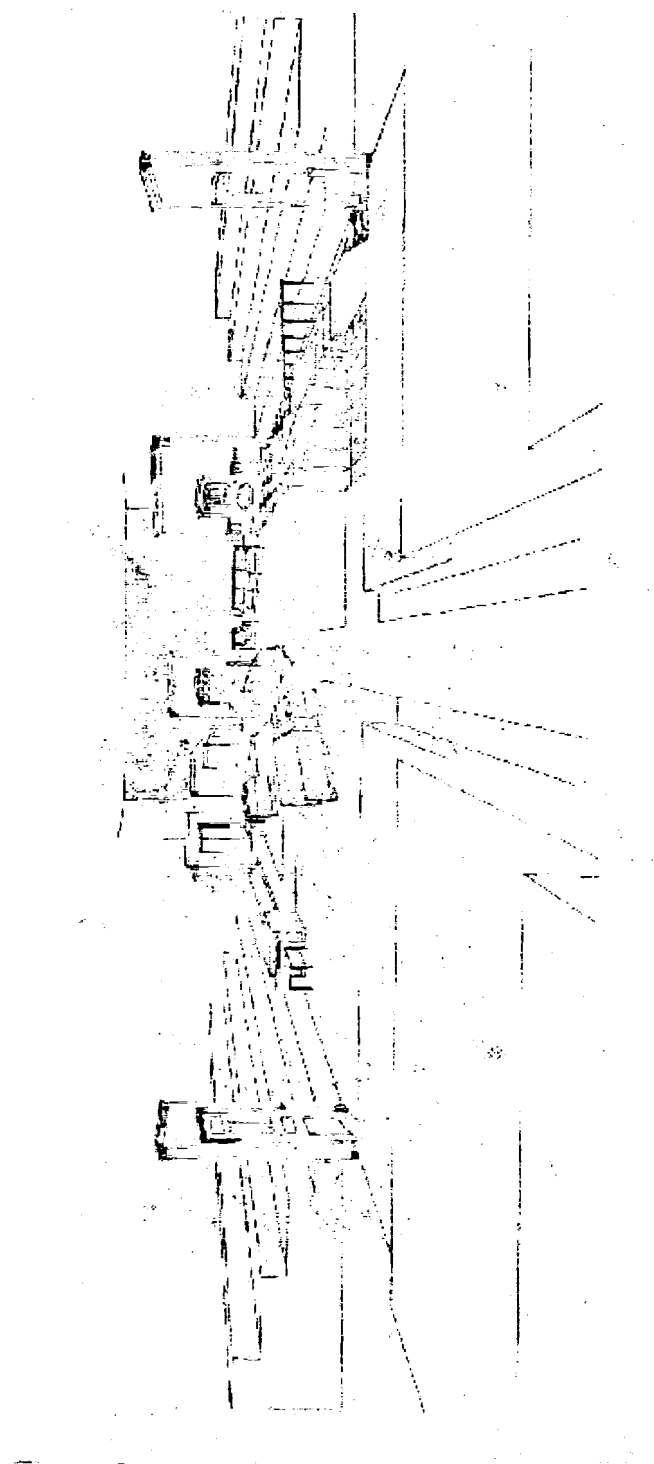


Figure 27. Perspective drawing of *Taking Steps* set.

This made it apparent that the audience would be very close to the action and was going to have a very intimate view of the show. There was also an unexpected excitement and anticipation about being the first production in Hauck auditorium, as far as anyone could gather, to place the audience entirely on the stage. The various drafting plates were completed in stages late in February and the technical director spent the beginning of March working on construction drawings and planning material orders.

As the actors began to rehearse in the performance space, the floor plan was taped down onto the stage floor to show the actors where everything would be placed. Two problems, both having to do with the seating risers, became immediately evident. Both of them had to do with the base floor plan drawing for Hauck auditorium from which the scene design was drawn. It was discovered that the stage depth was not accurate on this drawing and it did not include items that projected from the walls, such as radiators, sinks, air ducts, and pipes. This left an inadequate amount of aisle space around the seating units, in particular behind the downstage seating units as well as at the upstage and offstage corners of the side seating units.

The solution to this dilemma came in four parts. The first was to take away the last row of risers in each seating unit and place the first row of seats right on the stage floor, in turn decreasing the overall depth of each seating unit. The second was to slightly decrease the amount of depth between rows, further decreasing the overall depth. The third part came from a safety ruling of which we had not previously been aware. An audience member can be no more than seven seats away from an aisle. The seating units were not wide enough to have more than one aisle so the number of

seats was reduced on all the upper levels to seven. This reduced the number of seats to 104, which was still an acceptable number. The fourth part of the solution came from changing the location of the stairs for the seating units. The original design had a separate set of stairs coming up the back of each seating unit. Instead, the audience could enter from the front of the seating units and the stairs could be built into the platforms. These changes allowed for more than adequate aisle space around the seating units. The added space on the risers from having fewer chairs, even after building steps in the platforms, also allowed space for the light and sound boards and a small booth was built on the downstage end of the stage left seating unit. A special perch was built for the stage manager on the far stage right wall of the theater, above the rigging system controls, so she could see all of the action clearly.

To make absolutely sure that all safety guidelines were being followed, a meeting was set up with the local fire marshal and the director of Environmental Health and Safety at the University of Maine. They approved the seating configuration and offered a number of suggestions that would help ensure audience safety. Extra house managers were assigned and provided with flashlights. They were all given emergency evacuation training and many of them also had hands-on fire extinguisher training. An extra fire extinguisher was installed allowing for one in each corner of the stage. The director was asked to make an announcement before each performance explaining where the exits were located and that house staff would assist in the event of an emergency. Burnt out light bulbs were replaced and emergency lighting batteries were tested. The fire marshal also calculated the maximum occupancy to be no more than 130, based on the width of the exit doors

and exit stairwells. It was determined that each of the two official exits could safely evacuate 116 people, but the overall number reflected the possibility that one of these could be blocked by fire causing only one official exit to be available. There were three other ways to exit the stage, into the traditional auditorium seating, the scene shop, or into the Class of 1944 Hall via a small hallway. None of those were official exits, however, since they exited into other spaces and did not lead outside, so they could not be used to determine occupancy. This was not a concern, though, since the number of seats on the risers was already less than the occupancy rating.

Construction began the last week of March, leaving only five days before the load-in date. The basic structure of all seven flats, including the steel framed closet, which had to be welded in another building on campus, were completed by the load-in date. The front door and study doors were custom designed and construction was under way on those. The front door included a laborious process of cutting out, routing, and layering different detailed elements. (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Custom made front door.

The master bathroom and closet doors were pulled from stock and painted. The construction schedule following load-in consisted of daily shop work, a weekend work-call one week after load-in, technical rehearsals two weekends after load-in, with the production opening 2-1/2 weeks after load-in. Scenic “To-Do” lists were created and subdivided into three categories. High priority items that needed to be in place for technical rehearsals, medium priority items that needed to be in place for dress rehearsals, and low priority items that would only happen when the more important tasks all were complete.

During the two weeks following load-in there were three things that kept work consistently behind schedule. First, the available work force seemed to dwindle slightly so projects were taking longer to complete. Second, there were material orders that were late arriving, which was preventing a string of projects from progressing. Third, a majority of the set needed to be “faux” painted to look like wood, including the floors, with a four-step process. There were only a few people working consistently enough to learn the complex painting process, which was lengthened by the need for various amounts of drying time. The painting process could not be rushed, but at the same time a large amount of the detail work, as well as the front and study doors, could not be installed until the painting was complete.

Work-call weekend included putting up wallpaper, finishing arches on some of the flats, installing the stair railings, installing masking behind the bathroom and study doors, painting, installing the rest of the doors, and beginning to install the seating risers. The floor was ready to be painted by the Monday following work-call weekend. Floor painting had to happen late at night because the stage was needed

during the day for construction work and in the early evening for rehearsals. To allow for enough drying time, the floor painting was spread out over three post-rehearsal calls, which consisted of a base coat, a color coat, wood graining, and a water based polyurethane coating for protection. The marble floor also needed to be painted with a checkerboard of white and black marble tiles. Rather than laboring over individually painting the many different one-foot square tiles, full four-foot by eight-foot sheets were painted. When they were complete, the sheets were cut into one-foot squares and randomly installed to give a more natural look. The offstage floor was also given a fresh coat of black paint. The base moldings, chair rails, door casings, and wainscoting were cut to fit, painted in the scene shop, and then installed in time for technical rehearsals. Large synthetic crown moldings had been purchased from a company in Texas, but due to numerous difficulties with the order, the moldings had not arrived yet.

The set was in very good condition going into technical rehearsals. There were still minor details to work on, and the crown molding was not expected to arrive until two days before opening, but everything that was needed for technical rehearsals was in place. The floor was finished, the furniture was in place, and the flats were complete, with the exception of the crown molding. The Saturday morning of tech weekend was set aside for lighting and sound to run a cue to cue, but lighting was behind schedule. Cues were not recorded yet, there were major dark areas, and gel color remained an unanswered question. A decision was made to work through lunch, have an afternoon run-through with the actors, including as many cues as were written by then, and then quit early to make the stage available for more lighting

work. The next run-through was Sunday afternoon, but there were still a lot of lighting problems to fix.

The crown molding arrived on Monday and was immediately cut to size, and a base coat of paint was applied. The painting was completed on Tuesday and the crown molding was installed, completing the flats. At this point, the major construction effort before opening on Wednesday was completion of the seating units. The platforms were all in place, but they all needed railings, mid-rails, kick plates, stairs, facing, and a coat of black paint. Ultimately, the risers were in place and usable for opening night, but the painting had to stop before it was complete to insure that everything would be dry when the audience came in. Painting continued on Thursday and eventually was left partially completed with the back facing on the stage left unit never being painted.

The dress rehearsals went well, scenically, except for a few easy to fix problems. A decorative plate had been added behind the front door knob, but the extra thickness didn't allow the door handle to be attached very tightly, and it kept falling off. Also, some of the cloth masking behind the master bathroom fell down and needed to be re-hung. The night before opening, though, there were still major problems with the stage lighting. The levels were too bright, light spilled into spaces it was not supposed to be in, there were a number of incorrect cues, and a very distracting yellow gel color had been added to the living room, making costumes, actors, and scenery all look odd. Extra help was called in and most of opening day was devoted to correcting the lighting problems. Unfortunately, there were no more

dress rehearsals left to test the major lighting changes, but aside from a few minor problems, the new lighting was an enormous improvement.

CHAPTER THREE:

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Evaluation

Gillette details the following as part of his evaluation process:

“A: Reflect on the challenge. Did you do everything you could to make it succeed?

B: Review your use of the design process. Did you fully analyze the questions generated by the challenge? Did you do sufficient background and conceptual research?

C: Did you effectively communicate your ideas and thoughts to the other members of the design team?” (Gillette 31)

No matter how much work a designer does, or how “successful” their design is, one can always find things, in hindsight, that could have been done differently or perhaps better. Reflecting on the challenges with this design, I did everything, within my ability, to make the design a success. This design, and thesis, are part of a learning process and I learned a great deal that can be applied to future designs. However, I could have spent more time researching Victorian architecture, analyzing the characters, and creating elements to put in the design with which the characters could interact. Also, I learned that I could use more experience with drawing and rendering to create more evocative examples of my design concepts. That in turn would aid and increase communication with the other members of the design team. Overall, though, I feel this design supported the play well and that the project was a successful learning experience.

Conclusion

In taking on this design, I was not only fulfilling a requirement for a graduate degree, but also taking an opportunity to grow as a designer. Every chance to design another set provides a chance to increase design skills and learn new things. The

decision to move the audience on to the stage allowed for an opportunity to learn how to create audience seating. Not only developing the best sight lines, but also learning how many seats are allowed and how safety is factored into that. Working on this show taught me how important research can be. Had it been known ahead of time that Ayckbourn wrote *Taking Steps* to be performed in-the-round, it might have not been scheduled in Hauck Auditorium, or maybe the decision to move the audience to the stage would have come about sooner and allowed more time for other things.

This production also offered many chances to develop scene painting skills. Many different materials can be recreated on the stage with paint if a designer takes the time to look closely at the colors and patterns they contain. It was very exciting to choose a specific color of wood and to be able to duplicate that in the stage design. One lesson learned was the value of creating paint samples. The extra time it takes to make a sample version of what one plans to paint is well worth the effort. It can be used to choose colors for purchasing large quantities of paint, it is very useful in showing others on the production team what the set is going to look like, and it is valuable as a tool in teaching the crew how to do the painting.

One scenic skill that really improved with this production, was attention to detail on the set. An important part of that for this set was “aging” or “distressing”. For example, the house was old and a little worn, but new paint, wallpaper, and wood was used to build the set. After making everything look nice it was important to go back and make it look “distressed”. With a paint sprayer the walls were coated with a dark color to give the appearance of years of dust. Dirt and sawdust were swept across the floor to dull the polyurethane and give the house a lived in look. While an

effort was made to give the appearance of age, a lot more could have been done, especially with increased painting skills. The effort was noticed, though. A respondent from the American College Theater Festival came to one of the performances and met with the cast and crew afterwards to offer feedback. She appreciated the attention to detail that she had not seen on a lot of professional sets. Her one criticism was that the door blocks, that marked the location of three interior doors, seemed to be too small and too low to the ground.

My education as a designer improved, as a result of this design project, in the areas of communication, rendering, and realizing the importance of exploring alternate solutions. Communication is such a large part of being a designer. The better a designer is able to communicate what they are thinking, as well as interpret what the director and other designers are thinking, the better the chances that the production will have a unified design concept. A unified design concept is important so that the director and designers are working towards the same vision. Without a unified design concept, the finished products of each design area might conflict with one another. Conversely, when a production's design is unified not only do the various designers avoid conflicts, but all of the designs work together to enhance the production itself. Without excellent communication skills, a designer will have little chance of making others understand his or her plan, or understanding what others plan to do. This production helped improve my drawing and rendering ability, but there is still a long way to go. A natural progression would also be to graduate from working only with "white board" models that show shapes and locations, to completing a finished model that also shows color and texture. Finally, this

production has reaffirmed that it is important to constantly adapt and to keep the mind open to new ideas. There is always more than one solution to a problem and it is important to not focus solely on the first or easiest solution that comes to mind. A successful designer must explore new ideas, talk to other people, and take a few chances. It was not until I opened my mind to the suggestion of moving the audience on stage that the solution to so many problems fell into place. That is definitely a concept I will apply to future designs.

A last thought, or more of a pleasant observation, that became one of the most exciting things that happened during this design process, was to see the audience interact with the set. I had intentionally designed the aisles around the back of the seating units to keep the audience off the stage. Even with house managers to guide people, the audience ended up walking on the stage. (Figure 29).



Figure 29. Pre-show photo of the stage with audience. The man in the white shirt (right) is walking in the attic bedroom.

They not only walked on the stage, but they played on the stairs, miming what they had seen the actors do. They walked through doors, touched the walls, and looked closely at the scene painting and construction. Initially, it was disturbing to see people invading the stage space that is normally off limits, but once I got beyond that it was enjoyable to watch the audience interact with and take pleasure from the set.

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Other Online Resources

Antique and Home Hardware Store.

<<http://antiquehardware.com/>>

Northcott Theatre Archive.

<<http://www.northcott-theatre.co.uk/shows/takingsteps86.html>>

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<<http://oldhousejournal.com/>>

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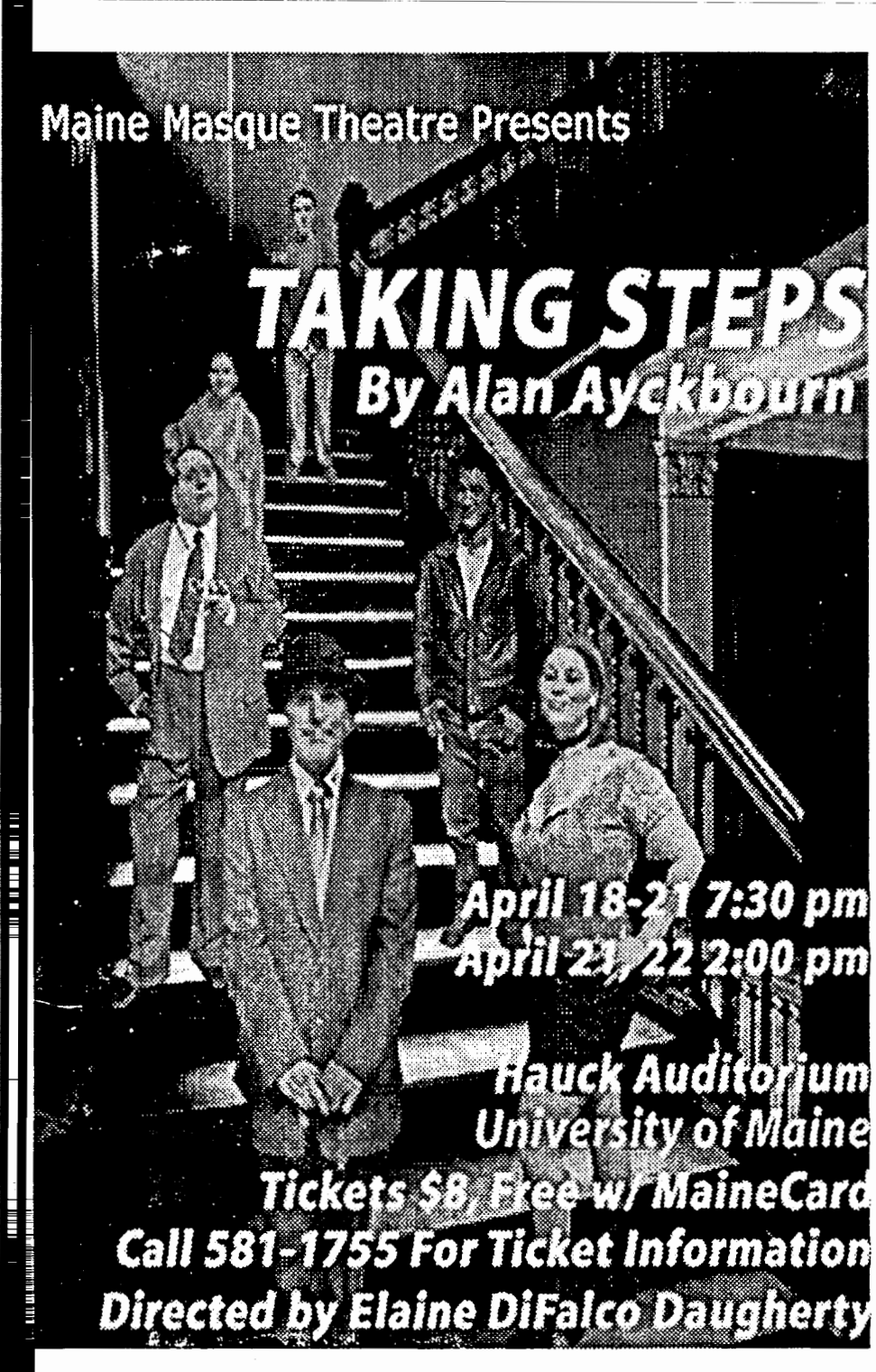
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The Unofficial Addams Family World Wide Web Site.

<<http://www.addamsfamily.com/>>

APPENDIX A.

PROGAM



Maine Masque Theatre Presents

TAKING STEPS

By Alan Ayckbourn

April 18-21 7:30 pm
April 21, 22 2:00 pm

Hauck Auditorium
University of Maine

Tickets \$8, Free w/ MaineCard
Call 581-1755 For Ticket Information
Directed by Elaine DiFalco Daugherty

Taking Steps

Cast

Elizabeth.....Mary McIntosh
Mark.....Andy Hicks
Tristram.....Trevor Bean
Roland.....Brad Fillion
Leslie.....Joe Kilch
Gitty.....Amanda Eaton

Crew

Director.....Elaine DiFalco Daugherty
Set Designer.....David Adkins
Light Designer.....James Gallant
Sound Designer.....Pete Miller
Costume Designers.....Annette Sohns, Jennifer Shaw
Stage Manager.....Lindsey Harriman
Assistant Stage Manager.....Andrea Hepworth
Technical Director.....Brave Williams
Properties Master.....Kevin Staples
Master Electrician.....Laura Fer
Hair/Makeup Designer.....Kelly Sanders
Multifaceted Technical Assistance.....Dan Daugherty
Scenic Painting.....Chez Cherry, Christopher Roberts
Erin McCormick, David Adkins
Costume Crew.....Katherine Braginton, Melissa Rosenberg
Properties Crew.....Christina Caparelli
Sound Board Operator.....Hillary Roberts
Light Board Operator.....Nathan Dore
Set Construction.....THE 225, Gary Desrochers,
Jeffrey Newcombe, Belinda Hamilton, Jeny Hall

Setting

Time: Act I: Friday night, The Present

Act II: Saturday morning

Place: "*The Pines*," a large Victorian manor of no great distinction.

Director's Notes

I think that each of us, at some time in our life, has stopped, looked around, and thought, "How on earth did I end up here?". For some reason, when one enters *The Pines*, that question emerges. Each character faces the dilemma of whether to respond honestly, and change the stable course of life, or to live in denial and continue on the path of least resistance. The questioning, deliberating, and answering are all great fun...that is, if its someone else doing it.

Cast Biographies

Mary McIntosh (Elizabeth) is a second-year biochemistry major and theater minor from Washburn, Maine. She is going to be a pharmacist, or play one on TV.

Andy Hicks (Mark) is a fourth-year theatre major from balmy tropical Massachusetts. He really likes marshmallow Peeps. He thanks his mom and dad for coming up yet again, and his cast and crew, as well as Fresh Samantha Lemonade, 'cause it's super.

Trevor Bean (Tristram) is a fifth year theatre major, graduating in May. He's performed previously in the Maine Masque productions of *Arcadia*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Into The Woods*, and *Cabaret*. He also assistant stage managed for *Hay Fever* and ran props for *When You Comin' Back*, *Red Ryder*. He would like to thank the cast and crew of *Taking Steps* for making his last acting experience at UMaine a wonderful one.

Brad Fillion (*Roland*) would like to thank numerous people (parents near and far, Jen, Shawn, friends and relatives) for their support and miles traveled to come and see this wonderful production. A big sank you to Laine for this grand opportunity. To the cast Wickey Wickey, Do Over, Hard Cheese, Truthfully this is comedy, and DAMN that Attic Door!!!! :)

Joseph Kilch (*Leslie*) is a fourth year transfer student majoring in math. He would like to thank his family and friends, old and new, for their continued support. This is his first theater appearance at UMaine.

Amanda Eaton (*Kitty*) is a second year theatre major from Dexter, Maine. This is her second production with the Maine Masque. You may have seen her this year in *Cabaret* as a Kit Kat Girl. She is very excited to be a part of *Taking Steps*. Look for her in *Upperdogs* later this semester and other Maine Masque productions in the future. Cheerio and Hard Cheese Mark!

Director

Elaine DiFalco Daugherty (Director) is a graduate theatre student. *Taking Steps* is the creative thesis project for her Master's Degree. She received her BA from UMaine in 1997, and now teaches THE 117, Fundamentals of Acting. Performance credits include Judith in *Hay Fever*, Annie in *Table Manners*, and Millie in *California Suite*. Directing credits include *Crimes of the Heart*, and last season's *I Am Yours*. She wishes to thank Dr. Sandra Hardy, Dr. J.N. Wilkinson, and Janet Warner-Ashley for their guidance and support as a Thesis Committee. They have each been inspiring, entertaining, and indispensable. Elaine's past, present, and (hopefully) future success is made possible by a very elite group of people: her infinitely patient husband, Dan, and her incredibly tolerant family, the DiFalco Posse. These individuals have been with her a long time, and have not yet denied knowing her in public...now that's true love.

Crew Biographies

David Adkins (Scenic Design) is the Facility and Production Manager for the School of Performing Arts. This scenic design is David's creative thesis project, completing his Master of Arts degree in Theatre. Other scenic designs at the University of Maine include *SubUrbia*, *When You Comin' Back Red Ryder* and *The Tempest*. David has also designed lights and sound for theatre and dance at venues across the state, most recently designing the lights for Penobscot Theatre's summer production of *Charlotte's Web*. David is looking forward to a relaxing summer and would like to thank his wife Adele for all her love and support.

Lindsey J. Harriman (Stage Manager) Lindsey is a third year theatre major. She most recently ran the light board for *Cabaret*. Last semester she stage managed *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* and directed *A Coupla of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking* for the Underdog Showcase. While studying theatre at UMF, her credits included *A Medieval Theatre Festival*, Assistant Stage Manager for the One Act Festival, props mistress for *She Stoops to Conquer*, and light board operator for *The Tommorrow Box*.

James Gallant (Lighting Designer) is a third year electrical engineering major and is currently the Vice President of Student Entertainment. This is his fifth (or so) show here, his first being *SubUrbia*. This is his first Lighting design here at the University. He has worked for the Maine Center for the Arts as well as The Penobscot Theater Company as stage manager for the Maine Shakespeare Festival. He would like to thank the cast and the crew for their support for the lighting in a difficult Black Box Set. He hopes everyone is able to see the actors and their **FACES** and has a great night at the theater.

Brave Williams (Technical Director) is a senior theatre major who has assisted with props for *Barefoot in the Park*. His work with *Taking Steps* is part of his senior project, which has been a great learning experience. He would like to thank David Adkins, Dan Daugherty, and Chez Cherry for their truth, grace, and teaching.

Annette Sohns (Costume Design) is a first year student from Bucksport, Maine. This is her first show designing.

Jenn Shaw (Costume Design) is from Minot, Maine, and graduated from Leavitt Area High School. This is Jenn's second semester working at the costume shop. Jenn would like to thank her mother for encouraging her to sew at an early age.

Special Thanks to Chez Cherry for scenic painting advisory, and to Dan Krohne for the twinkle in his drawers.

**KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN
COLLEGE THEATER FESTIVAL™**

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John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KC/ACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KC/ACTF representative, and certain students are selected to participate in KC/ACTF programs involving awards, scholarships, and special grants for actors, playwrights, designers, and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for inclusion at the KC/ACTF regional festival and can also be considered for invitation to the KC/ACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2001.

Last year more than 1000 productions and 19,000 students participated in the American College Theater Festival nationwide. By entering this production, our department is sharing in the KC/ACTF goals to help college theater grow and to focus attention on the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

APPENDIX B.

ORIGINAL CAST

Taking Steps first opened in Scarborough, England in September of 1979. It re-opened in London, England at the Lyric Theatre in September 1980 and ran for nine months.

The Original Cast was:

Elizabeth Crabbe – Nicola Pagett

Mark – Paul Chapman

Tristram Watson – Michael Maloney

Roland Crabbe – Dinsdale Landen

Leslie Bainbridge – Richard Kane

Kitty – Wendy Murray

APPENDIX C.

SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPT

Taking Steps is set in a large Victorian manor house called *The Pines*. The time is present. Act I takes place on a Friday evening and Act II continues the following morning. The action begins with Elizabeth in her bedroom writing a Dear John letter to her husband Roland, having been married just three months and only deciding to leave him during lunch that day. Her brother Mark is waiting to take her to the train station. Elizabeth wants Mark to return to the house after dropping her off so that he can console Roland when he reads her letter, but Mark has other plans. Mark is in a rush because his fiancée Kitty, who left him at the altar, is coming home and he wants to patch things up with her. Elizabeth tries to convince Mark that if he's there to comfort Roland when he reads her letter that Roland will be more likely to give Mark the loan that he needs to open his dream business, a fishing shop. While they are talking the doorbell rings and Elizabeth sends Mark to see who it is. Tristram Watson has come on behalf of Mr. Crabbe's law firm to oversee the signing of papers in Mr. Crabbe's purchase of *The Pines*. Mark shows him to the lounge to wait for Roland and heads back upstairs to Elizabeth. Elizabeth convinces Mark to drop Kitty off at her parent's house and come back to help Roland. Mark leaves to pick up Kitty with Elizabeth in the master bedroom and Tristram waiting in the dark in the lounge.

As he waits Tristram thinks he is the only person in the house, but he hears faint noises coming from the floor above, which starts to put him a little on edge. Before long Roland comes home to discover Tristram sitting in the darkened lounge.

Roland calls for Elizabeth and for their maid, Mrs. Porter, but Elizabeth does not hear him and Mrs. Porter had left earlier in the day. Over drinks, Roland explains that he has definitely decided to purchase the house, but he would like to string the seller, Mr. Bainbridge, on for a short while since Mr. Bainbridge is also a builder and Roland would like him to throw in some free repairs along with the purchase. Elizabeth starts down the stairs, but hears Roland and retreats back to the bedroom. The topic of conversation in the lounge turns to the house being haunted and Roland tells Tristram about the ghost, Scarlet Lucy. The original owner of the house went bankrupt shortly after building it and had to sell it cheap. The woman who purchased the house turned it into an exclusive brothel. One of her girls got into a fight with a client who ended up killing her causing a scandal that closed the brothel. It is said that the ghost of the murdered girl still prowls around the house and if she likes you she will climb into bed with you. If she isn't happy with you, the rumor is you will be dead by morning.

Leslie Bainbridge arrives and the three men head up to the attic to inspect the house and discuss possible repairs before the purchase. When the men go upstairs Elizabeth takes the opportunity to run downstairs and head out. Shortly after she leaves, Mark arrives back at the house with Kitty. By this point the three men have come back to the second floor and headed down the hall, while Mark takes Kitty to the attic so she can get some rest and so he can look for Elizabeth. It has started to rain outside and Elizabeth comes back in, slightly wet, and meets up with Mark who drives her to the train station. When the three men look through the master bedroom and private bathroom, Tristram sees Elizabeth's note and points it out to Roland who

takes it down with him to the lounge. As Roland is about to read the message the phone rings and he hands the note to Leslie asking him to read it. Leslie reads the note then hands it to Tristram to read. Leslie is afraid that Roland will not purchase the house if he knows that his wife has left him and pleads with Tristram not to tell Roland the contents of the note until after the check has been signed. Tristram can not keep the secret though and tells Roland whom promptly starts crying and becomes inconsolable. Leslie and Tristram assist Roland up to his bedroom so he can retire for the night.

Meanwhile Kitty has thought things over and has decided to leave. She writes a note for Mark and tries to sneak out, but every time she ventures down the stairs she hears someone in the hall and has to hide. Roland asks Tristram to stay with him in the house for the night and gives him a pair of his monogrammed pajamas. Roland decides he does not want to sleep in the master bedroom because the room reminds him of Elizabeth so he asks Tristram to stay there and heads down the hall, taking with him a glass of brandy and Elizabeth's bottle of sleeping pills to help him sleep. Mark arrives home and goes upstairs to check on Kitty. She hears him coming and jumps into bed pretending to be asleep. Before long Roland comes back to tell Tristram that the other rooms on the second floor also remind him of Elizabeth so he is going to sleep in the attic. While Roland is speaking with Tristram in the master bedroom Mark comes down the stairs and heads off down the second floor hall to sleep in one of the other bedrooms. Roland heads up to the attic and this time Kitty does not have time to get back in bed so she ends up hiding in the closet. When

Roland gets in bed the roof starts leaking over him, so he moves the bed away from the leak, and in the process traps Kitty in the closet.

So now Tristram is in the master bedroom. Mark is in one of the other bedrooms on the second floor. Roland is asleep in the attic and Kitty is trapped in the closet behind the bed Roland is sleeping in. Elizabeth, having decided not to leave Roland, arrives back at the house. Tristram gets up to turn off the light and Elizabeth, hearing his footsteps, thinks it is Roland. She heads up to the master bedroom, goes to the bathroom to change into a nightgown and then slips into bed with a terrified Tristram who, having never met Mrs. Crabbe, thinks he is being visited by the ghost Scarlet Lucy.

Act II picks up early the next morning with Tristram asleep in the master bedroom and Elizabeth asleep with her arms locked around his waist. Roland is in a deep sleep from his night of heavy drinking and Kitty is still trapped in the closet behind his bed. Mark, first to awake, heads downstairs and outside for an early morning jog and relaxes in the lounge. Tristram, awaking to find himself trapped in bed with Mrs. Crabbe, thinks she is Scarlet Lucy and fears he may be dead when the sun rises. He tries tapping s-o-s in Morse code on the floor, which attracts the attention of Mark, who thinks Roland is in trouble and rushes up to the master bedroom to find Tristram in bed with his sister. Mark helps Tristram out of the room, careful not to wake Elizabeth, and Tristram explains the situation to Mark. During his explanation Tristram tells Mark that Roland is sleeping in the attic, where Mark thinks Kitty is sleeping. So Mark drags Tristram up to the attic to see who is there, only to find Roland out cold in the bed and no sign of Kitty. Tristram sees the brandy

glass, bottle of sleeping pills, and Kitty's note. He reads the note and assumes that Roland has written a suicide letter. Roland stirs, but Mark and Tristram, assuming that Roland has overdosed on sleeping pills, determine that they need to keep him moving until the pills wear off. So they drag him down to the lounge and attempt to keep him awake and moving. Tristram brings the pills and note with him and sets them on the table in the lounge.

Elizabeth hears the noise downstairs and goes to investigate. Mark tells her that Roland, distraught by her leaving him, spent the night in the attic room and tried to kill himself. Elizabeth thought Roland was in bed with her all night and thinks that Mark is lying to her until Tristram blurts out that he was the one in bed with her. Elizabeth, upset, asks Tristram to leave. As Tristram goes to get his clothes Mark tells Elizabeth a long winded story about Kitty disappearing and Elizabeth promptly falls asleep on the sofa next to Roland, who is also still deep asleep. So Mark heads upstairs to get dressed. On his way up Mark sees Tristram and sends him to the attic to get dressed while Mark heads off down the second floor hall. While in the attic Tristram hears Kitty in the closet and lets her out. They begin talking and Kitty quickly becomes entranced with Tristram. After talking on the bed for a bit they both end up falling asleep in the attic bedroom. Leslie arrives in his full motorcycle gear and when no one answers the door he lets himself in the house and finds Roland and Elizabeth out cold in the lounge. He sees and reads Kitty's note on the table and putting that together with the bottle of sleeping pills worries, the same as Mark and Tristram had, that Roland has tried to commit suicide. When Leslie is unsuccessful trying to wake Roland he tries to wake Elizabeth. Seeing Leslie in his motorcycle

outfit Elizabeth fears she is being attacked and she wrestles Leslie to the ground pinning him between her strong dancer's legs. The scuffle wakes up Roland who calls for Mark to come help. Mark recognizes Leslie and after some apologies they all sit down to discuss the sale of the house and wait for Tristram to bring down the papers for signing.

When Tristram fails to come down, Roland sends Mark up to fetch him. Mark heads up to the attic only to find Tristram in bed with Kitty. After a short confrontation Tristram heads downstairs where the paperwork is signed and Mark and Kitty stay in the attic room to talk. In the meantime Elizabeth has gone up the master bedroom to unpack. Kitty leaves Mark in the attic and heads downstairs with her coat and bags. She hesitates at the front door unsure about the future, but eventually she takes the leap and leaves, letting out an exhilarated cry as she passes through the door. Tristram, who is standing in the lounge doorway, sees Kitty leave and quickly follows after her. Leslie and Roland are talking in the study when Elizabeth, having decided once again to leave Roland, comes to the front door with her packed bags. Elizabeth hesitates at the door the same as Kitty, but unlike Kitty, Elizabeth drops her bags and turns back into the house still unable to break free.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

David Adkins was born in San Diego, California on October 15, 1969. He was raised in various states across the country, graduating from Mt. Ararat High School in Topsham, Maine in 1987. He attended the University of Southern Maine from 1987 to 1988 and later transferred to the University of Maine in 1991. He graduated with honors from the University of Maine in 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. In the fall of 1996, David returned to the University of Maine to enroll in graduate study of Theatre, serving as a Graduate Assistant for the Maine Center for the Arts. In 1997, he accepted a full time professional staff position in the School of Performing Arts at the University of Maine and continued to study for his graduate degree while working.

After receiving his degree, David will continue his work as Facility Manager for the School of Performing Arts. David is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Theatre from The University of Maine in May, 2003.