Production Design in the Contemporary American Film: A Critical Study of 23 Movies and Their Designers

By Beverly Heisner

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While the viewer's eyes are trained on the actors, the production design sets the mood for the film. The design also subtly comments on the action and the characters, moves the plot forward and adds to its symbolic content. The production design of 23 films of the 1980s and 1990s is analyzed here. The films are divided into five areas: realistic films set in the present day, stylized films (including horror) set in the present day, period films, period films that move through several decades, and science fiction and fantasy films. Among the movies analyzed are *The Silence of the Lambs, She's Gotta Have It, The Fisher King, Ragtime, Barton Fink, Goodfellas,* and *Alien.* The quality of the designs is assessed by a careful reading of the *mise-en-scene.* Often the designers' own words are used to describe the effects and the process involved in achieving them.

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"in-depth...detailed descriptions...insightful"--*Choice.*

About the Author
Beverly Heisner lives in Columbia, South Carolina.

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