

The Set Dresser

While the set builder is responsible for planning and building the set, it still has to be “dressed”, much as you would furnish and decorate a room when you move into a new house.

Hilary Howden has been helping with props at the Venture Theatre for quite some time but four years ago, she took on the job of dressing a whole set for the first time. This was our production of *Rebecca*. Hilary told us “I came up with the idea for the curved staircase and it was marvellous because Mike (Mike Cox, set builder) translated what was in my mind to the stage. I also did things that perhaps weren’t normally done in this theatre such as writing on the wall. It seemed to turn out alright,” she added modestly and it certainly did. The set for *Rebecca* got its own round of applause when the curtain went up!

Since then, Hilary has been asked to dress several sets and has helped out with others. “I don’t have anything to do with layout of the set,” she says. “That’s the job of Mike and the producer and I don’t do painting but I like to design.”

Once the set is on the stage, Hilary can get to work on furnishings, curtains, flowers, arrangements and lots of pots! She makes some of the curtains and has made costumes as well. If it’s a period play, it’s important to know what sort of wall colourings would have been used traditionally.

“I do sketch it out and I do look in a lot of books to make sure I’ve got the period right. When I did *Arsenic and Old Lace* I looked at various books and the colours were done in New England colours, pale grey and that “washed out” look. “I just come up with various ideas,” she says. “They don’t always take root but usually they do.”

Hilary supplies a lot of props and says she finds car boot sales very useful but you have to get there early! “But I can’t do everything,” she added “So if anyone wants to help out they’re more than welcome.”

If you think helping with set dressing would be your cup of tea why not visit the theatre on a Monday night after 8.30pm and see if you would like to become a member? We always welcome new volunteers!