

Job roles - ScreenSkills

Production Designer

What does a production designer do?

Production designers create the way a film or TV drama looks. Films can be set in any number of places, a Victorian orphanage, a Caribbean cruise ship, or another planet, for example. They work with all the other visual departments, costume, lighting, visual and special effects, and graphic design. They help create the visual world in which the story is set.

Production designers start with the script. Researching and collaborating with the director, director of photography and other heads of department, they imagine the screenplay visually. They draw sketches showing mood, atmosphere, lighting, composition, colour and texture, which are given to the art director to develop.

Then they work with other art department members to draw up a budget. They prioritise the work schedule and allocate the management of finances to team members performing different tasks. They are usually freelancers.

What's a production designer good at?

- Creativity: visualise the whole look of a film or TV drama, starting with words on a page
- Art: draw by hand to scale, do technical drawings and computer-aided design
- Design: understand colour theory, know the history of architecture and interior design
- Knowledge of photography: understand cameras, lenses and lighting and their effect on a film's look and mood
- Organisation: manage budgets, draw up schedules, prioritise and meet deadlines
- Communication: share the vision with a wide number of different people and keep a team working together well

Art Director

The role of an art director varies slightly depending on the kind of programme being produced.

In a studio show, art directors are responsible for turning the creative vision of the **production designer** into a reality by drawing plans and visuals and making models. They organise the art department and oversee the construction of the set. They are responsible for the way the set is dressed and the inclusion of any props. They remain on set throughout the production, to ensure the set is maintained and dressed appropriately to accommodate the varied content.

On shows where there isn't a set, but where the content is filmed at various locations, they work with the **producer** and **director**. They create 'mini-sets', managing the dressing and styling of an area (indoors or outdoors) in which to film. Often, they design these props themselves and oversee their build.

In both situations they may also plan special effects like fake snow, pyrotechnics and gunge. If there is not a production designer on a production, they ensure that what they do meets health and safety guidelines, meets the needs of the **producer director** and is within budget.

Art directors are almost always freelancers.

What's an art director good at?

- Creativity: visualise what a production requires, the look of a set or location, imagine how it will accommodate the production brief and department requirements
- Art: be able to draw conceptually and technically, work with specialist design software, build props and small sets, have knowledge of art history
- Knowledge of construction: source appropriate materials and props, be aware of the latest developments in production design
- Knowledge of production: understand production techniques, studio environments, studio capabilities and the challenges of working on location
- Leadership: be able to share their vision with a wide number of different people, manage budgets and people, draw up schedules, prioritise and meet deadline.

Construction Manager

Construction managers look after the building of studios and sets. They make sure that sets look as realistic or otherwise as desired. They interpret the drawings of the production designer, art directors and draughtspersons and work out how to build them in ways that are safe and environmentally friendly.

Then they hire the workforce, the carpenters, painters, riggers and plasterers, and ensure everyone knows what needs to be done and by when. They are responsible for getting the necessary materials and tools on site and for the safety of the crew working with machines and at heights.

Construction managers are responsible for dismantling the sets, known as 'striking' the set, and ensuring all the materials are recycled as far as possible, or put into storage, taking into account Albert and other environmental considerations.

What's a construction manager good at?

- Construction: know all aspects of building work
- Reading drawings: interpret drawings to plan size and scale, understand the designer's vision, work out what this means in terms of building requirements
- Organisation: manage a budget, work to a schedule, recruit hundreds of constructors within a tight timeframe
- Communication: be able to liaise between the artists and the construction workers, get a team to work well together
- Staying safe: ensure all health and safety measures are in place

Props master / dress

A prop, or property, is any moveable item that can be seen on a film. It could be a hat, gun, cushion, wine glass, lightsaber, carpet, kitchen unit, tree or aircraft. Prop masters run the property department which makes, stores and transports the props as well as preps the props for each day's shoot.

Prop masters usually start work a few weeks before shooting begins. They work with production designers, set decorators and art directors to work out what props are needed. They do research and then draw up properties lists, deciding which are to be hired and which are to be made. They create a 'set and strike' schedule to share with location and construction departments

Where props are to be made, prop masters recruit the carpenters, artists and prop makers and manage the schedule for production. Where they are hired, they work with the production buyers to source them.

When shooting is finished, they return of all hired props and organise the sale or safe disposal of everything else

What's a prop master good at?

- Understanding film: pick up the director's vision, break a script down for props requirements take account of the need for continuity
- Historical knowledge: research different eras, dress a set authentically
- Craftsmanship: work with a wide variety of materials, craft and repair items
- Moving items: handle large, heavy but fragile items
- Communication: work closely with the production designer and other departments, share the vision with the props team
- Organisation: manage staff, budgets, complex schedules, transport and storage

Set Dress/decorator

Set decorators are storytellers. They create the background of the action, explaining the context, adding mood and visual interest as the drama unfolds. While prop masters deal with the placing of objects an actor holds, set decorators are concerned with the walls, floors, vehicles and furniture.

Before filming begins, set decorators work with the director, art director, master and production buyers to go through the script and work out what sets are needed. They make a list and a plan for the props master to follow. Then they buy or hire the items and get in props makers to make furniture.

The day before shooting set decorators arrive early to begin dressing the set. After the director and director of photography have checked it, the set decorators move on to the next scene. Once a scene has been shot, they are responsible for striking (taking apart) each set.

What's a set decorator good at?

- Understanding film: be able to pick up the director's vision, know how a background can tell a story
- Style: have a good eye for decoration, a sense of colour and form, precise attention to detail
- Historical knowledge: research different eras and dress a set authentically
- Communication: work closely with the production designer and other departments, share the vision with the team
- Organisation: break down a script for set requirements, manage staff, budgets, complex schedules and transport

Costume Designer

Costume is at the core of a film or TV drama. As well as contributing to the look, it helps actors feel emotionally connected to the character they are playing through wearing the character's clothes.

Costume designers design, create and hire the costumes for the cast. They start by working with directors, producers, writers, the production designer and hair and makeup designer to contribute to the look and storytelling of the production. They research, sketch and draw mood boards of characters and clothes to communicate the style.

They then break down the script, working out what they need to create or hire. Working within tight budgets and deadlines, they recruit a team, organise a schedule of purchases and ensure the costumes are created on time for fittings. With the help of the team they schedule fittings and take photographs. These are then discussed with the producer and director and signed off.

Once shooting starts, they are always on set whenever there are new actors or new looks.

What's a costume designer good at?

- Styling: understand the director's vision, know what that means for the costumes
- Costume history: know contemporary fashion and clothing design through the ages, be able to research using books, museums, the internet
- Storytelling: understand how a story can be told through garments and colour palette
- Making clothes: have an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of garment production
- Organisation: break down a script into costume requirements, schedule the costume production, manage the team and the budget
- Communication: share the vision of the costume design with team members, listen to actors and respond to their needs