

GLORY



Portfolios: Stroking Your Own Ego to Get Jobs

PORTFOLIO

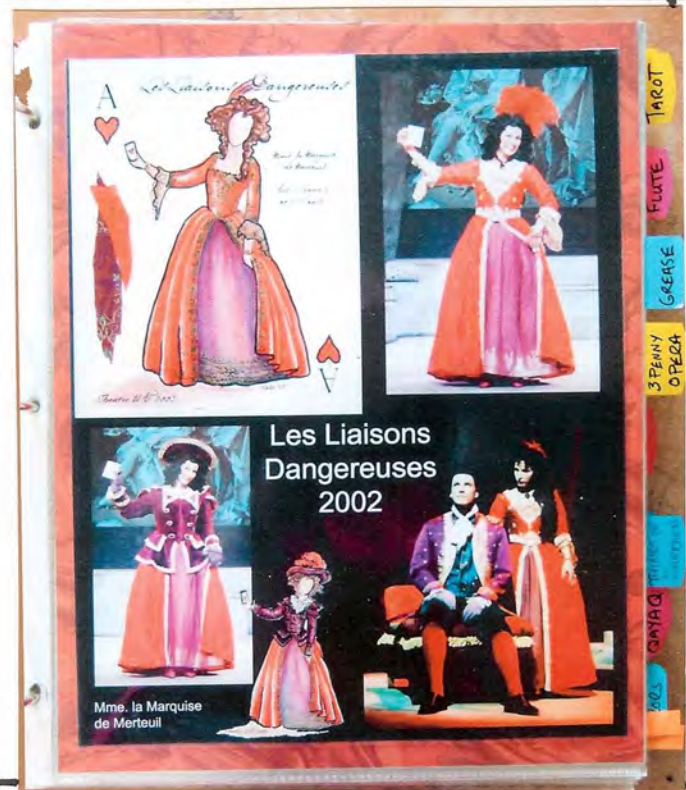
REVIEW: I

have no idea why most design students seem to need to be bullied into developing a portfolio; so much so, we at UAF tried to force them to do bi-annual

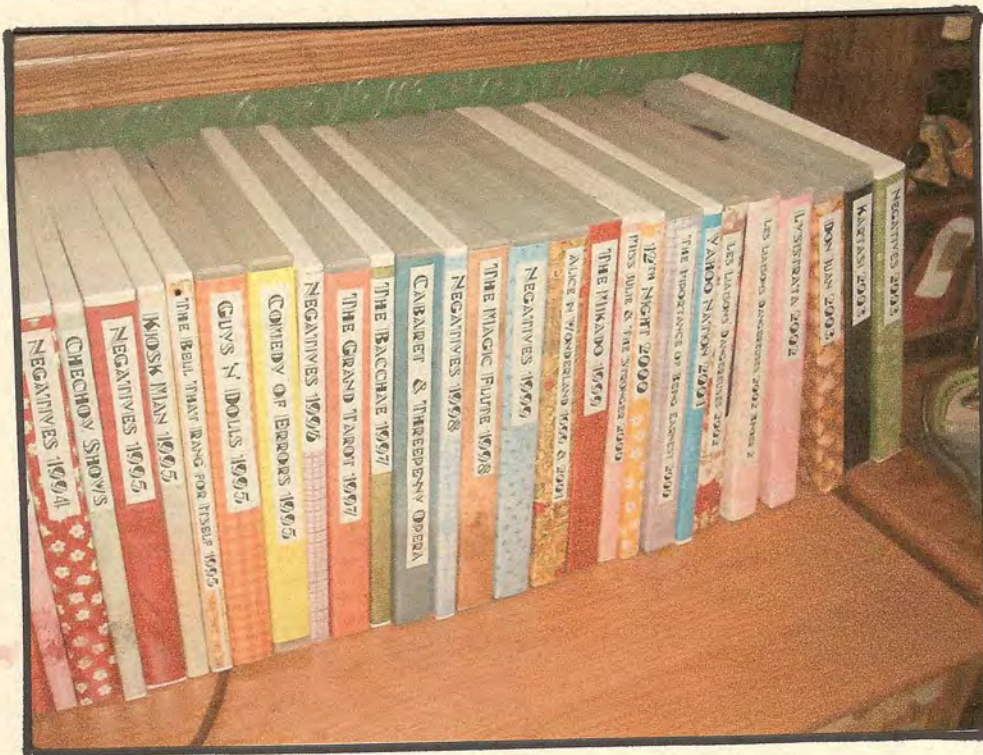
portfolio reviews just to get them to begin collecting the necessary materials. Portfolio building is easy and a total ego boost. All you need to do is to take lots of photos, (an easy cheap thing to do these days, just stuff a digital camera in your backpack and snap away daily as you do stuff) save bits of your best old work, sort the good stuff into folders, binders or boxes, and then label and paste the best stuff all into an album that essentially says "I am so cool, who wouldn't want to hire me?" When you are done, you fondle it, and say "Wow! I am brilliant after all!" then show it to your friends and colleagues who will say similar nice things, which will put you in the positive frame of mind needed for interviews. Even if the interviewer never cracks open the portfolio, it will have helped your confidence and your recall of the good things you have done that you need to tell the interviewer.



TARA MAGINNIS - COSTUME DESIGN



PORTFOLIOS FOR ALL YOUR JOBS: Most advice on portfolios for costumers tends to center on straight design portfolios. Yet there are relatively few design jobs out there that consist solely of costume design. My own fairly typical university position at UAF was supposed to consist of equal parts of teaching, research, and public service in my field. In other words, for my job I must, in addition to costume design all shows, teach classes in costume design, costume history, stage makeup and theatre history, do research and publications in my field, do related public services like curate exhibits of costumes for museums, advise local schools about costumes and makeup for shows, teach every sort of cutting and construction in the costume shop, and do periodic displays, posters, and photos for publicity, not to mention running the costumes.org web site. For me to go to an interview with only a pure design portfolio would be to leave out more than two thirds of my work.



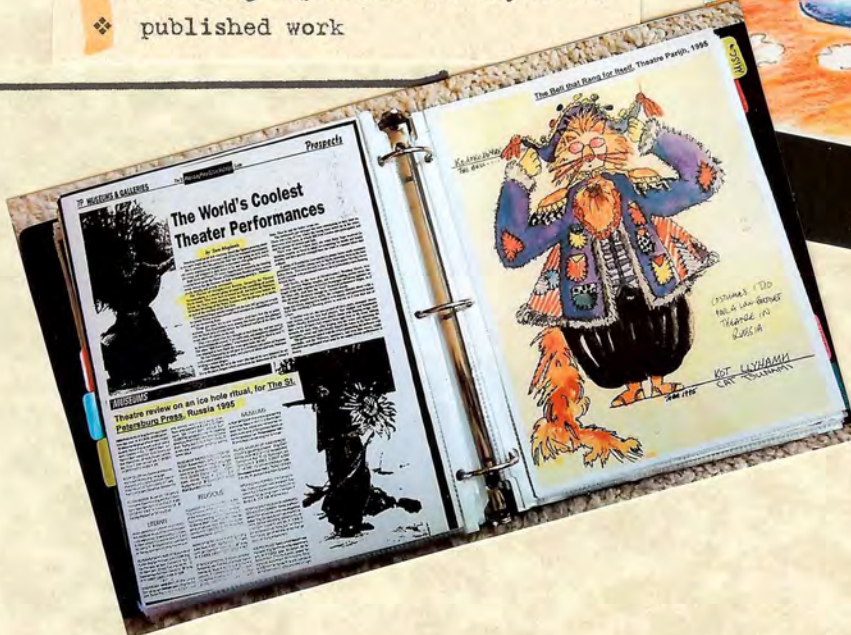
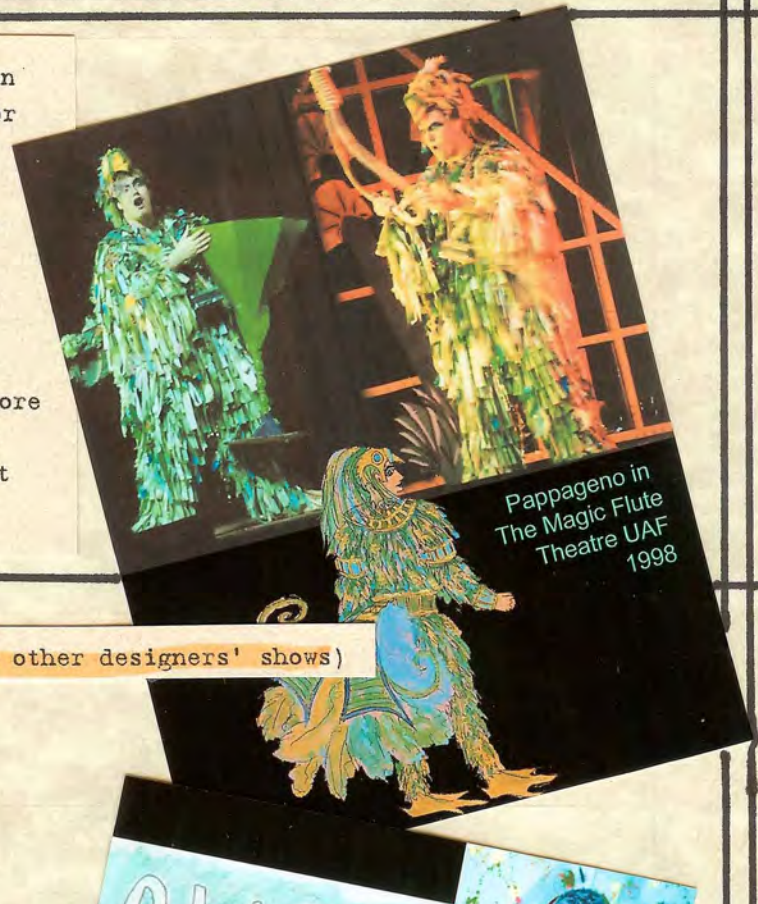
SECONDARY PORTFOLIOS:

So for a number of years I divided my work into several small portfolios (in addition to my design portfolio) that I used to highlight my other work and interests. There was a booklet of some of my

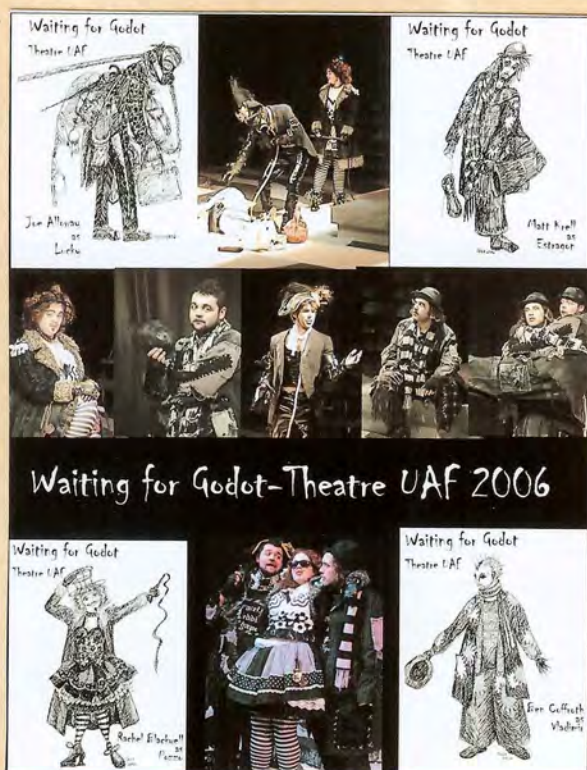
published articles, one of transcripts, certificates and awards, one for the classes I teach, one of cutting work I'd done, one of costume crafts, one of posters, displays and artwork, and one of stage photographs. This was probably overkill, but it illustrates the varied kinds of things one can put into a portfolio to represent one's work. Eventually I decided to make a sort of 8½ x 11 mega portfolio that blended items from some of these with my design work, so articles I'd written were put next to the shows that they had grown from, ditto crafts, cutting, makeup and posters. I now keep binders of old show renderings, information, photos, etc. at home as back up records to cull illustrations for articles, or things to add to the portfolio for specific occasions.

STUDENT PORTFOLIOS: Students, who have just begun to get experience, and who mostly are applying for lower costume positions like stitchers, crafts workers, and design assistants, should consider developing a combination portfolio that showcases their work in these areas in addition to design. When a student is just starting out, she should consider putting everything she has into her portfolio, and later pulling things out and archiving them as they are replaced by newer or more important work. Examples of things you might not have thought of that can go into a general student costume portfolio, or into separate ones:

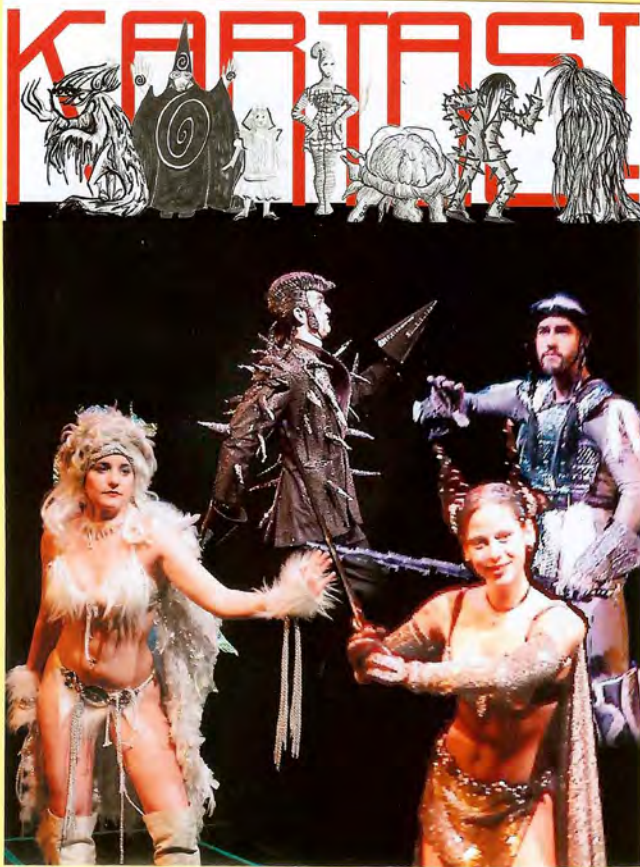
- ❖ poster design
- ❖ sewing (especially sewing you did for other designers' shows)
- ❖ costume and textile crafts
- ❖ dyeing and painting
- ❖ draping
- ❖ flat patterning
- ❖ school projects
- ❖ web sites
- ❖ school grades & awards
- ❖ museum work (cataloging)
- ❖ historical reproductions
- ❖ photography
- ❖ jewelry and sculpture
- ❖ work with dolls
- ❖ work in other areas of theatre
- ❖ misc. awards
- ❖ makeup design
- ❖ teaching experience at any level
- ❖ published work



So when I was much younger, and beginning my portfolio, I included cover designs for an SCA 'zine I drew, many photos of my hats and other costume crafts I built for the college costume shop, photos of some historical reproduction fans I made as a gift, Xeroxes of museum cataloging I'd done as a college project, awards certificates for local costume and sewing contests I'd won with photos of the winning costumes, my transcripts, letters of reference, a few designs, and every newspaper photo or mention of my contest wins, or review of my costumes in shows that I could get. It wasn't until much later that I could divide up into more than one portfolio, and later still before I could move on and take most of this early stuff out. As you go through your career, you will, depending on the directions your work takes, add new sections to your portfolio highlighting other areas like this:



TEACHING PORTFOLIOS: The fact is that in hiring for a teaching situation, like a university, this *should* be the main thing people look for. When I made these as separate from my main portfolio I put a copy of my syllabus, photos of my students' class projects, and copies of my student ratings of instruction printouts and suggestion pages into packets for each class. **If you are a student who hopes to one day be hired for this sort of position, you will want to do bits of volunteer teaching (for Girl Scouts, SCA, teaching crafts at fabric stores, etc.) and save your class handouts and take photos of what your students did.** Even when you get into a tenure track teaching position at a university, you will need to keep compiling all this stuff for your periodic reviews, and for tenure and promotion applications. In or out of academia, start compiling as you go, so you won't get slammed with the need to dig up this crap during a show. For non-how-to classes like costume history, drama lit, theatre history or others that have a paper trail, make Xeroxes of a few student costume history projects like patterns from antique garments, or copies of theatre history papers to serve as examples of your teaching. For craft & design classes photograph your class demos or student's projects in costuming and makeup as you go along (digital cameras help) and archive them. This can also help your students in making their own portfolios, plus it can allow you to have exactly to sort of how-to photos that you can turn into publishable articles and books. The Rose Hat project in the elsewhere in this book was one I did as an in-class demo, and because I photographed as I did each step, I'm now getting twice the mileage out of one piece of work.



The Grand
Tarot
1997



CUTTING AND CRAFTS PORTFOLIOS: Back when I graduated from college I first found work as a costume crafts worker and cutter, so I mainly focused my portfolio on work I did on other people's shows. I felt this would show that I could faithfully follow somebody else's designs as well as my own. If I sensed, as I was working on a project, that it was suitable portfolio material, I simply asked the designer for a photo or color Xerox of the rendering. I would then display a photo of the completed costume next to the copy of the rendering on which it is based. If possible, I even ask the actor to pose in the same position as the rendering, the better to show off my ability to reproduce a designer's work exactly. If the work is of a craft nature like dyeing or painting, I'll also save and attach swatches of dyed or painted show fabric. Now that I incorporate bits of this into my main portfolio I do the same, plus archive bits of craft projects into binders for use in articles, and things like this book.

The Marriage Proposal



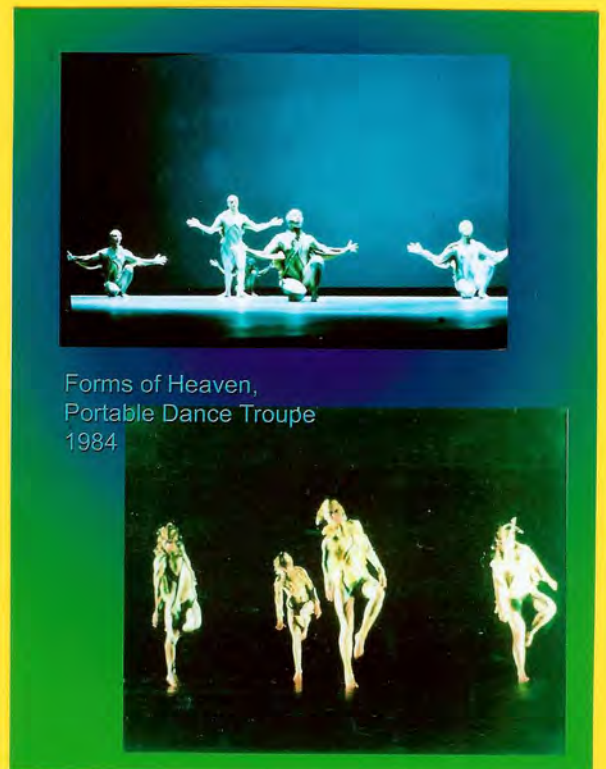
Georgia Resident Acting Co.
1985





WEB PORTFOLIOS: These days it is a good idea to make a web portfolio in addition to your hard copy portfolio. Generally the same advice is useful for both. Show your best stuff, keep the presentation simple with no distractions, and label things with enough information to make sense. Do not try to use fancy web do-dads like music, mystery meat (buttons without captions), splash screens, animations, weird fonts, patterned backgrounds, etc. Be sure to include your contact information in an easy to find place on your site. If you already have a personal web site, clearly label to separate out your personal stuff (vacation snaps, blog, fan fiction) from the work stuff, or even put the two on separate sites. The more you want your site to be seen as "professional", the less personal stuff should intrude. If someday you end up teaching, however, you will want to keep your site a little bit more personal in order to encourage a mild sort of cult of personality among your students, but keep things within bounds, your students do not want to see you on vacation in a bathing suit, or read your blog rants to friends on how much you hated a movie. Prospective employers are even less tolerant.

TALKING IN VISUALS: Portfolios basically exist as a teaching supplement in a job interview. Some people will best understand what you have done and learned from reading it in your resume, others will respond to hearing it from you in the interview, yet others will only "get" it when they see it in your portfolio. This has to do with the different ways people process information and learn. You should try with your portfolio to state in simple visual terms what it is that you can do, by showing pictures of what you have done. Ideally, the portfolio should be clear even to somebody who cannot read the captions. In most interviews for costumer's jobs, directors, technical directors, and non-costume designers are making the hiring decisions, so it is not in the best interest of the applicant to assume the viewers have a specialized knowledge of costume construction or design. It often helps to show steps in the process like sketches, research, sources, swatches, renderings and finished products in a logical order to help people to understand how you work.



TALKING TO DIRECTORS: It is above all, necessary to demonstrate how you communicate with the director and other designers. If your design portfolio shows only photos without renderings, they will wonder "Will I be given any idea how the costumes look before first dress?" If you include renderings but no photos, they will wonder "Yes, but do they really look this good on stage?" If all the renderings and photos match each other too closely, they will probably guess you did the renderings after you made the costumes (even if you did not). If your renderings look like the work of God, and you have no preliminary sketches, they will wonder "Won't she get upset if we reject a design?" Fact is directors want evidence in the design portfolio that you are flexible, that they will get early information like research and sketches from you, that they'll see renderings before you make the costumes, and that the costumes look good. This is why it is important to save as much information as possible on each show.

BUILDING PORTFOLIOS: The main two keys to building good portfolios are simple: collect information (renderings, sketches, swatches, photos, etc.) on everything you do, and edit and re-mount the new information you have every six to twelve months. Ultimately the thing that will "sell" your design portfolio is the design, or other work in it. The display is just a vehicle for showing your work. This is why collecting information on your work is the most important part of the process. Working on updating every six months is just a way to make sure you (a.) don't let the work pile up, and (b.) still can get access to your work for photos, swatches, etc. if you find you forgot to gather something important.

RECORDING THE HISTORY OF SHOWS: If you update your portfolio regularly, you also will know what renderings, photos, sketches, and swatches you don't need. You can perform a service to your theatre, and save yourself storage space, by putting all unnecessary information into a folder for each show and donating it to the theatre archives, local library, or theatre museum. You will help to preserve the history of your theatre, provide future scholars with reference material, and assure your own (minor) immortality by doing so. This also allows you to park your car inside your garage.

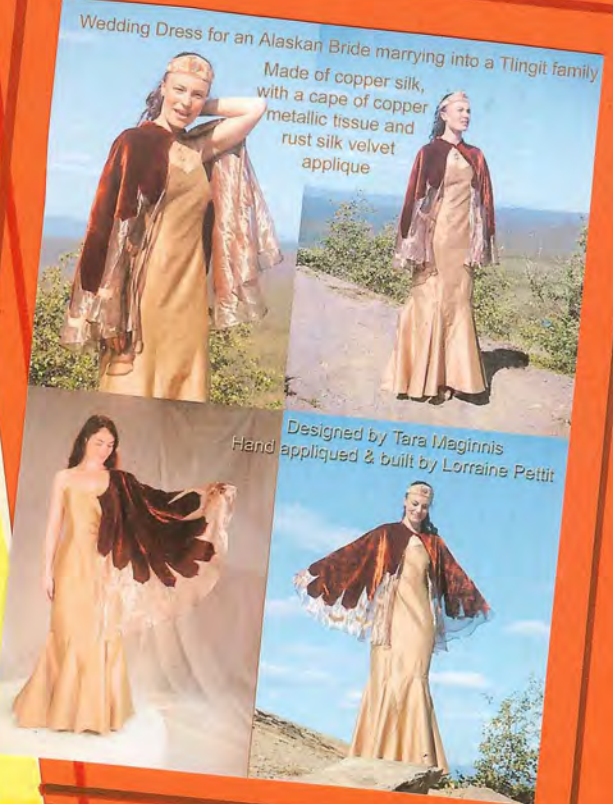


KARTASI
THEATRE UAF
2003
SLIME AND
THE
LAW SAYER



SLIME
DEVOURS
VIRGO,
TO HER
DELIGHT

ONE IDEA AT A TIME: When you are putting in a display of your work on a show, try to stick to showing one thing about the show that best illustrates your best work in it. Don't try to get in the whole show, just this one best "idea" that made the show different from your other work. The rest you can donate to the library. For example, in my portfolio, Woyzeck only shows close-ups of its Expressionistic makeup and fabric painting, The Eagle's Gift shows the spirit costumes made with recycled garbage, Cabaret has swatches of the show fabric next to the Otto Dix picture from which I drew the color scheme, and a few photos showing the color scheme on stage, Qayaq has renderings directly opposite the research Xeroxes on Alaska Native dress that inspired them, and Ubu Roi shows only the three most outrageously weird cartoonish sketches I did for a show with about 60 assorted weird costumes. Work out what single thing in each design shows you at your problem-solving and creative best, and concentrate on showing just that. Adobe Photoshop or other image-processing programs are great for making layouts that help to do this.



KEEP THINGS SHORT, SIMPLE AND CHEAP: Once you have achieved critical density (one to three pages for a resume, one binder of design portfolio) dump out old less important stuff every time you add something new. Don't hit folks with more information than they can grasp in one sitting. Don't display your lack of organizational skills by showing a loose pile of photos and sketches. Don't spend lots of money on a fancy display that looks better than your renderings do. Label things clearly and simply. If you show just a little stuff, but all of excellent quality, people will just assume all your work is of a similar quality.



PAT THE BUNNY: Wherever possible, include touchy-feely stuff. Swatches help, texture helps. If you are doing a costume crafts portfolio, with photos of fabric painting, latex casting, armor, jewelry, distressing, save your test samples and swatches for each project and glue them next to the photo of the completed work. Keep the connection between photo and sample clear and simple, not junky, and label it. Keep it about as simple as the children's book Pat the Bunny, and it'll be ok.

LET YOUR PERSONALTY SHOW THROUGH: Don't try to fade into the woodwork however, this is costume design, not public accounting, people do not expect you to be boring and faceless. Simple does not translate as boring. As a student many years ago I went to the URTA National Unified Auditions and was amazed. Out of dozens of design students looking for jobs, I appeared to be the only one not wearing black or brown, and not carrying one of those identical ugly black vinyl zippered portfolios. The school representatives later told me that I was the only one who didn't send a white or beige resume. While I would like to think that my natural talent, great slides, and wonderful presentation is what got me twice as many interviews as the others, I'm inclined to think that my hand made giant marbled portfolio, hot pink resumes, 3-D displays of crafts and sewing, and my cream white "painter's" pantsuit also made the impression that I was a designer and not a frightened rabbit. Make your portfolio and resume look like whom you are. And when you become somebody else, (and you will eventually,) change it.

RESUMES: What can I say about this? Too much has been said already, lots of "don'ts" that have more to do with how to get jobs in banks than in theatre. Lots of different confusing formats from "skills resumes" to straightforward chronological ones. Most of what you need to do should be obvious: list relevant work you've done, both paid and volunteer. List in a short manner when, where, and what you did. List everything when you're young, dump older information when you get too many things to list. If you have a lot of work in several distinct categories, divide the information into headings to make it easier on the reader. Don't advertise inefficiency with typos and bad Xeroxing. List most recent stuff first.

Sample Resume

Edwina Splitstitch

	Work Address	Home Address
Costume Technician/Designer www.edwinasplitstitch.com	123 Inigo Jones Blvd Gontcharova CA 94903 (415) 123-4567	456 Wilhelm St. Gontcharova CA 94903 (415) 890-1234

Education

- ❖ University of Delaunay-Telk, Gontcharova CA, BA Theater Major, Art Minor, Expected Graduation May 2010
- ❖ J. R. Planche Mem. HS, Stibbert OH, Graduated May 2006

Awards & Accomplishments

- ❖ Best Costume Design for a Student Produced Show, (for The Wedding) UDT, 2008
- ❖ Best Dresser/Makeup Crewperson on a Mainstage Show, (Tartuffe) UDT, 2007
- ❖ Treasurer, Student Drama Association, UDT, 2007-Present
- ❖ Best Noble Costume, Stibbert Renaissance Fair, Stibbert OH, 2006

Professional Experience

Stibbert Renaissance Fair Costume Construction Crew	Stibbert OH Summer 2007 & 2008	Imaginary Force Workshop Designer: Alexandra Exter
Romanovs on Ice Wardrobe Crew	Benois Auditorium 2/08	Gontcharova Concert Assn. Designer: Craig Carr

Community Theatre Experience

Vampire Lesbians of Sodom Milliner/Costume Crafts	Schlemmer Spielhaus Club 12/07	Spielhaus Drag de Lights Designer: Jean Derain
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Educational Experience

The Wedding Costume Designer	Lab Theatre, UDT 3/08	UDT Student Drama Assn. Director: D. Saxe-Meinegen
Richard III Costume Construction	Golovin Theatre, UDT 11/07	UDT Theatre Dept. Designer: Dolly Tree
Grease Wig Dressing & Makeup	Golovin Theatre, UDT 4/07	UDT Theatre Dept. Designer: Nick D.Larmessin
Iolanthe Costume Construction	Golovin Theatre, UDT 4/08	UDT Theatre Dept. Designer: Dolly Tree

Skills

- ❖ Sewing, Knitting, Crochet
- ❖ Welding, Jewelry Arts
- ❖ Microsoft Word & Excel, Adobe Photoshop & Dreamweaver

References:

Jean Derain Costume Shop Manager UDT Theatre Dept Golovin Theatre Center 123 Inigo Jones Blvd Gontcharova CA 94903 (415) 123-4567	Dolly Tree Asso. Professor/Designer UDT Theatre Dept Golovin Theatre Center 123 Inigo Jones Blvd Gontcharova CA 94903 (415) 123-4567	Alexandra Exter Costume Designer/ Wardrobe Manager Stibbert Renaissance Fair 4567 Beaton Road Stibbert, OH 23456 (216) 456-7890
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*Letters of recommendation, portfolio, transcripts or more information is available upon request.
or view my online portfolio at www.edwinasplitstitch.com*

PERSONALITY IN IMPERSONAL DOCUMENTS: I do, however, believe one thing about resumes very strongly. You need to use a resume to show people who you are professionally, not to hide who you are. If you are using your resume to hide who you think you are, you have too many insecurities, and need a new therapist not a new job. You need to let the person you are show in some way; in particular you need to be memorable without being offensive to the kind of people you would like to work with.



HOW I DID IT: Back when I was hunting for a job after grad school, I printed on my then favorite color of Xerox paper, which happened to be the retina-challenging "Pulsar Pink." I do not recommend hot pink resumes. I do recommend printing your resume on your favorite color of paper, even if that happens to be white. It will give people a clue who you are, which is what they are really looking to find out. The sort of director who looks at a hot pink resume and thinks "this woman is too weird for me" will probably not direct the kind of shows I like to design. It's OK if I give her a clue not to hire me. On the other hand, it did interest the kind of loony directors I enjoy working with ("Hey, this woman looks weird enough for me!"). This is why I say you need to pick your favorite color. If you are a "Beige Marble" Xerox paper person, and you do "Pulsar Pink" because I did it, you will attract exactly the wrong sort of prospective employers. It's like your Mom says on your first date: "Just be yourself."

EMPLOYER SPECIFIC RESUMES: Ideally you need to make a long version of your own resume which you keep on disk for reference, which lists everything you ever did, where you did it and when. If you keep a long version of your resume on disc, with little or nothing left out, you can copy the file and then cut it down to 1-2 page length with items on it that best suit the specifics of the job for which you are applying. Customizing the experiences you list to the requirements of the job can make it easier for the interviewer to figure out if you have the right qualifications, and it eliminates unnecessary detail that can distract the reader. With word processors this is now so incredibly easy you can afford to do this every time you make an application.

METAMORPHOSES: For both portfolios and resumes you need to ask yourself periodically "Who am I, and what do I want to do with my life?" Granola-headed as this sounds, it is important. As a student and young graduate I had a heavily tech portfolio and (after my first disastrous "cute" resume) low-key brown utilitarian resume. I switched from my paper bag brown chronological resume to a hot pink category one after developing my self-confidence as a designer in grad school. I started working on making teaching portfolios shortly after I realized I was mutating from a designer into a teacher. As I progressed from teacher to academic researcher I added my academic writing portfolio. After I began to paint, do creative writing (including plays), and ran off to Russia, I realized it had been a decade of hot pink paper, and I was getting much weirder than hot pink by the minute. In 1996 I began work on making an online portfolio, which within a few months, mutated into The Costumer's Manifesto web site. I now have a print portfolio that blends my designs, published writing, and photography and a parallel online portfolio within my web site. In many ways this book you have in your hands is an attempt to fuse the two into one, derived as it is from writings I have done for the site and journals, photos of old shows I've taken, and how-to information I've developed for classes.



RECYCLE YOUR LIFE: This is why collecting your old work is so important. Right now, in this book I'm writing, now sitting in your hands, there are parts that I made and saved as a young costume virgin thirty years ago. If I had not, this book would not be in your hands right now. Collecting portfolio material allows you the knowledge you can gain from self-reflection on your own past as an artist, plus it allows you to get double or triple duty from work you have done. Even if, like me, you end up working in the same place for 18 years, these things are constantly useful both as fodder for tenure and promotion, plus ready-made content for books, web pages, art exhibits and articles. There is no point at which it is "too early" to begin collecting this stuff. They assist you in psychologically useful things like maintaining self-esteem, engaging in self-reflection, and better understanding your accumulated career knowledge.