

100 Years of Set Design at the Ottawa Little Theatre (OLT)

*This is the fifth of ten exhibits to be displayed
during the 100th Anniversary Season.*

*It will be on display in the
Besserer Street lobby from
February 12 – March 2 during the run of
“Pride and Prejudice”*

As for all theatres, OLT set designs have always been a balance between an artistic vision and the practical constraints of performance space and resources. After the varied locations of the early years, the move into it's own theatre in 1928 allowed designs to blossom. OLT quickly developed a tradition of high production values and lovingly executed scenery.

After the fire, the 1972 theatre provided the added ability to fly complete sets out of sight, improved lighting, expanded workshops, storage and painting spaces. From the 1980's onwards, OLT's success enabled it to afford full time technical staff.

OLT's unique and highly desirable facilities have attracted and encouraged “resident” designers and it has gained a reputation for professional level set designs and production standards. The tradition continues today with a stable of highly competent designers, recognized by an impressive record of awards.

Early Years

In its first few years, the Ottawa Drama League mounted plays in the Victoria Memorial Museum, the Russell Theatre and other spaces. As was the custom of the time, set “designers” were not acknowledged in the programmes and designs were severely restricted by the constraints of the performance space. Sets were probably built and painted elsewhere.

Set on the small stage of the Victoria Memorial Museum (1915). Play and designer unknown



A THEATRE OF IT'S OWN

The opening of it's own theatre in 1928 began a leap forward in the scope and quality of OLT sets. Designers were now recognized in the programmes and sets could become more complex and ambitious. The ability to build and paint on site made all the difference. Among the productions were “Shakespearean” sets with minimal scenery; sets that involved stairs and variable acting levels; “exteriors” with sky and painted drops; and plays with multiple scenes. The “classic” 3-wall interiors became more elaborate and realistic.



WILLIAM CROMARTY AND DOROTHY WHITE:
“Anthony and Anna”, the opening play at OLT’s first theatre of its own (1928)

Principal Set Designers at OLT

	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
William Cromarty (1928 – 1933)			■									
Lysle Courtenay (1931 – 1935)			■									
Lord Bessborough (1933)			■									
James Dudley (1934 – 1940)			■	■								
Verne Ridgeway (1934 – 1963)			■	■	■	■						
Robert Darby (1935 – 1945)			■	■								
Billi Burritt (1939 – 1959)				■	■							
Ted Fancott (1950 – 1986)				■	■	■	■	■				
George Palmer (1951 – 1969)				■	■	■						
Stan White (1953 – 1962)					■	■						
Vic Atkinson (1960 – 1961)						■						
Anne Goetz (1961 – 1973)						■	■					
Leslie Hutchins (1964 – 1994)						■	■	■	■			
Dorothy Shaw (1980 – 1986)								■				
Ed Guignon (1980 – 2009)								■	■	■		
Margaret Coderre-Williams (1981 – PRESENT)								■	■	■	■	
Gord Beckingham (1982 – 2008)								■	■	■		
Philip Lawless (1983 – 1987)								■				
Robin Riddihough (1989 – PRESENT)									■	■	■	■
Nancy Solman (1990 – PRESENT)									■	■	■	■
Tom Shields (1991 – 1997)									■	■		
Jennifer Donnelly (1992 – 2005)									■	■	■	
Tom Pidgeon (1994 – PRESENT)									■	■	■	■
Don Torney (1998 – 2009)									■	■	■	
Andrew Hamlin (2003 – PRESENT)										■	■	■
Pat Elliott (2004 – 2011)										■	■	
Paul Gardner (2009 – PRESENT)											■	■

■ = Graphic Representation of Data.

1930's



LORD
BESSBOROUGH:
*"Romeo and
Juliet"* (1934)
(Photo by
Karsh)

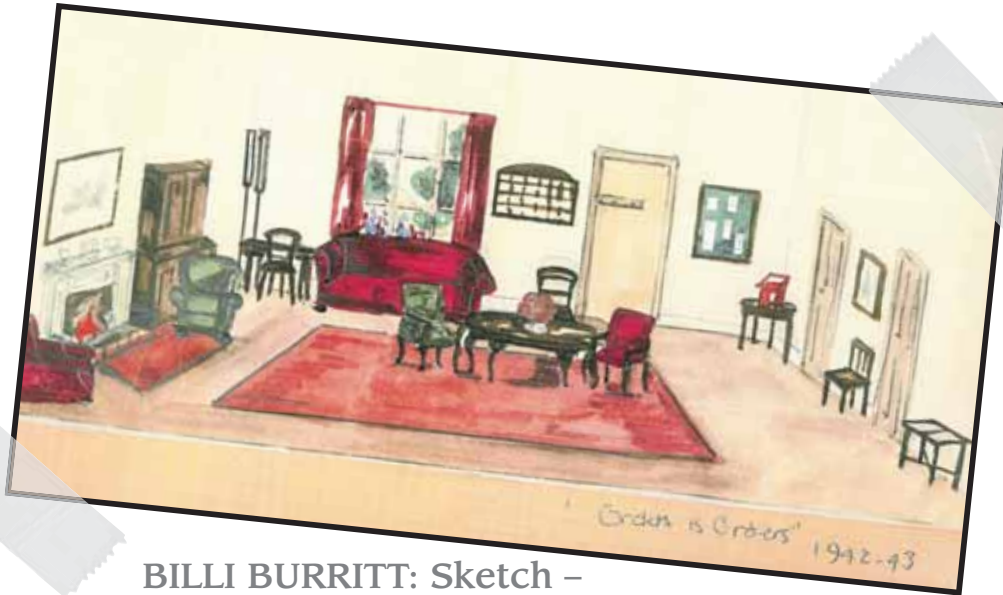


VERNE
RIDGEWAY:
"Saint Joan"
(1936)
(Photo by
Karsh)

ROBERT
DARBY:
*"Pirates of
Penzance"* (1936)
(Photo by
Karsh)



1940's



BILLI BURRITT: Sketch –
"Orders is Orders" (1942)



BILLI BURRITT:
Sketch –
*"The Gentle
People"* (1946)

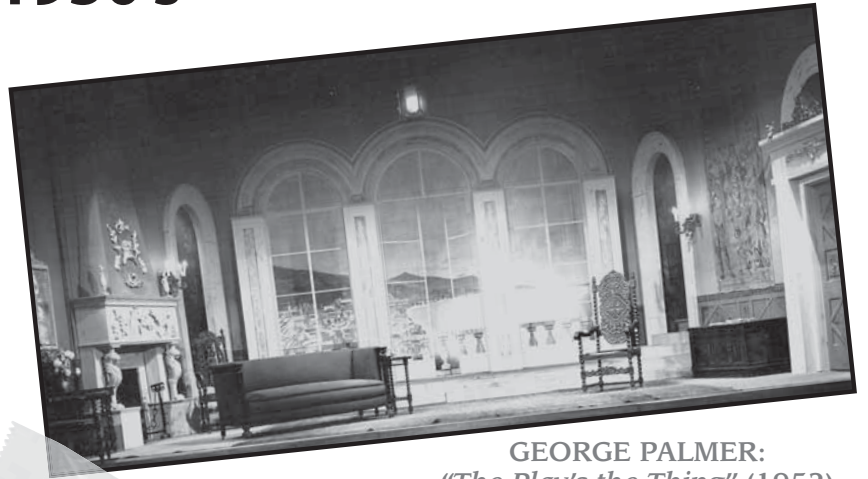


BILLI BURRITT & ADELE ERVIN:
"Claudia" (1944)

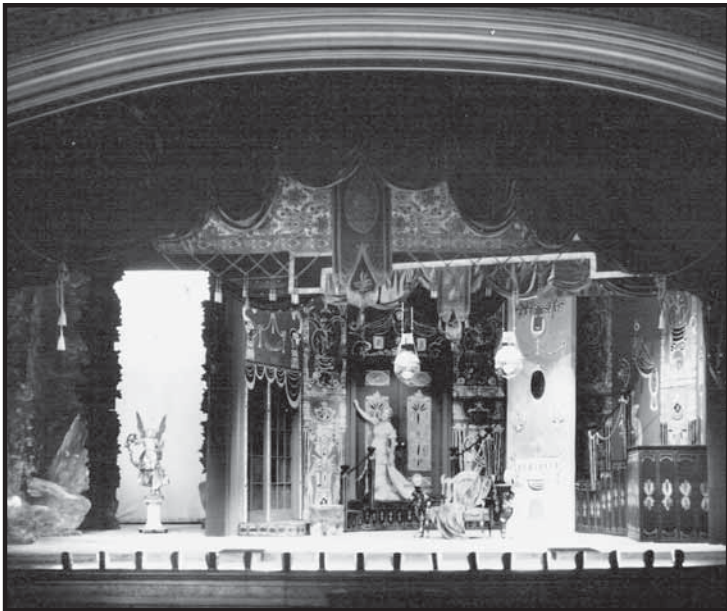
1950's



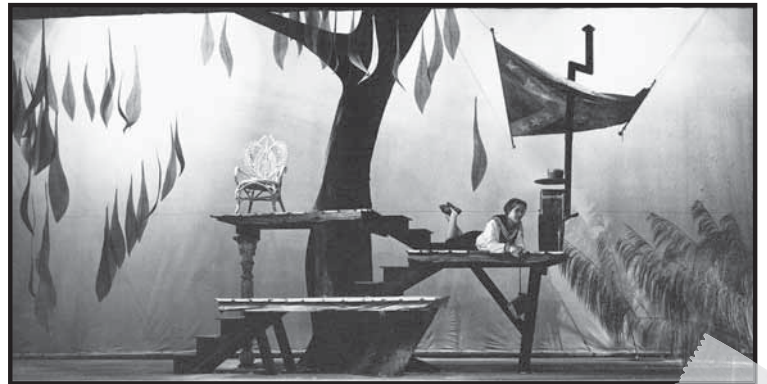
GEORGE PALMER:
"Ring around the Moon" (1952)



GEORGE PALMER:
"The Play's the Thing" (1952)

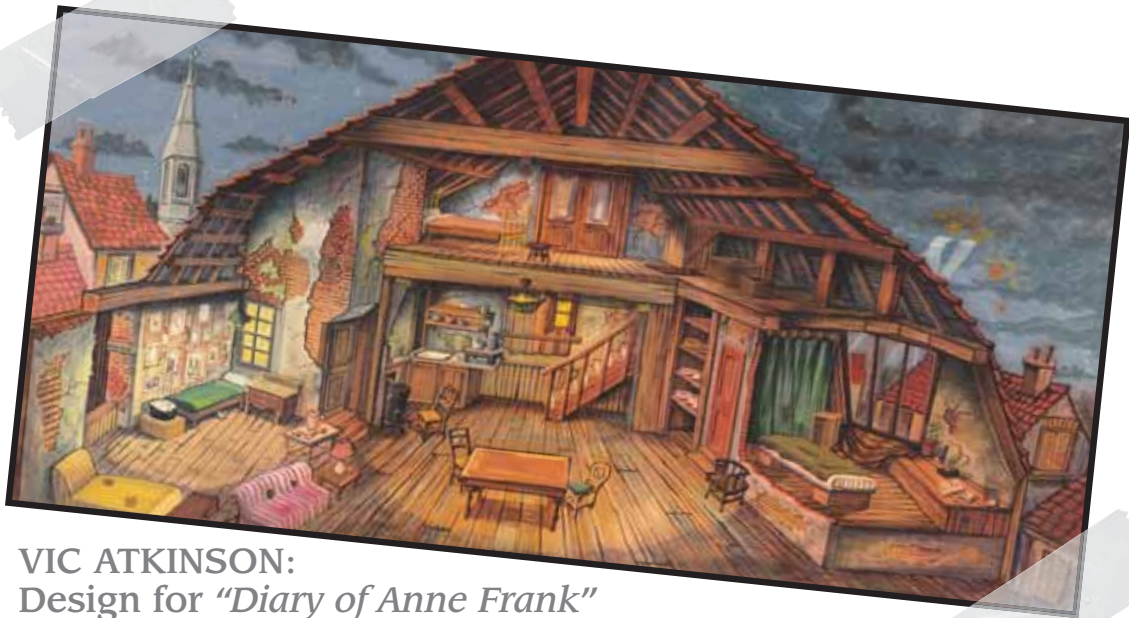


STAN WHITE:
"East Lynne" (1955)



STAN WHITE:
"Grass Harp" (1957)





VIC ATKINSON:
Design for *"Diary of Anne Frank"*
(1960)

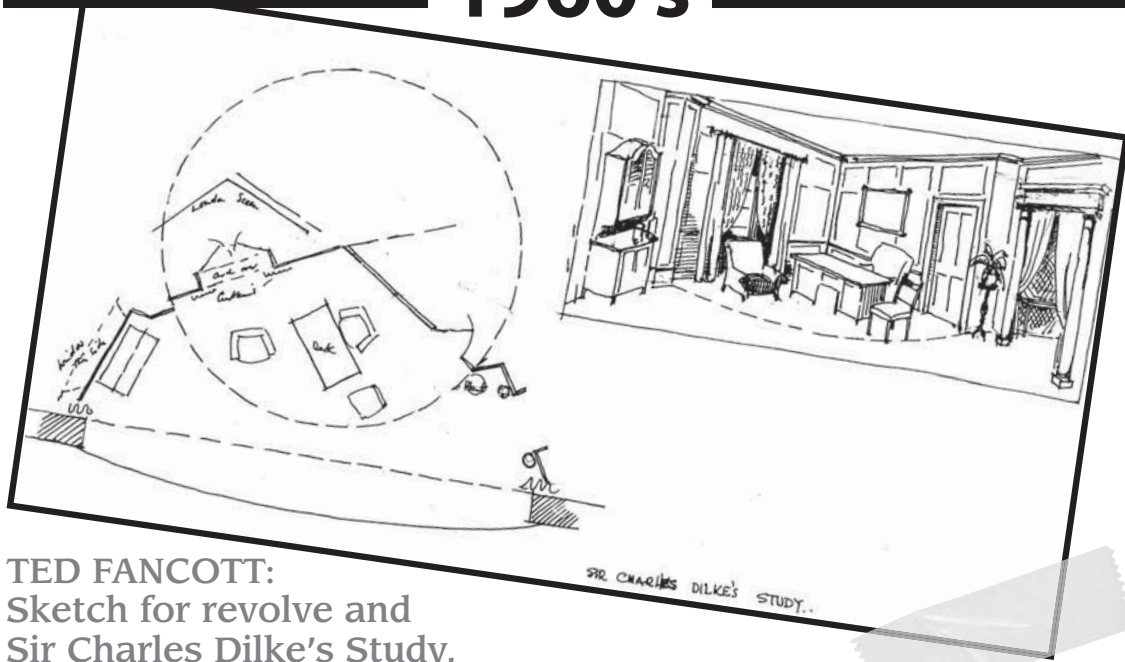


VIC ATKINSON:
Set *"Diary of Anne Frank"*
(1960)



ANN GOETZ:
"Five Finger Exercise" (1962)

1960's



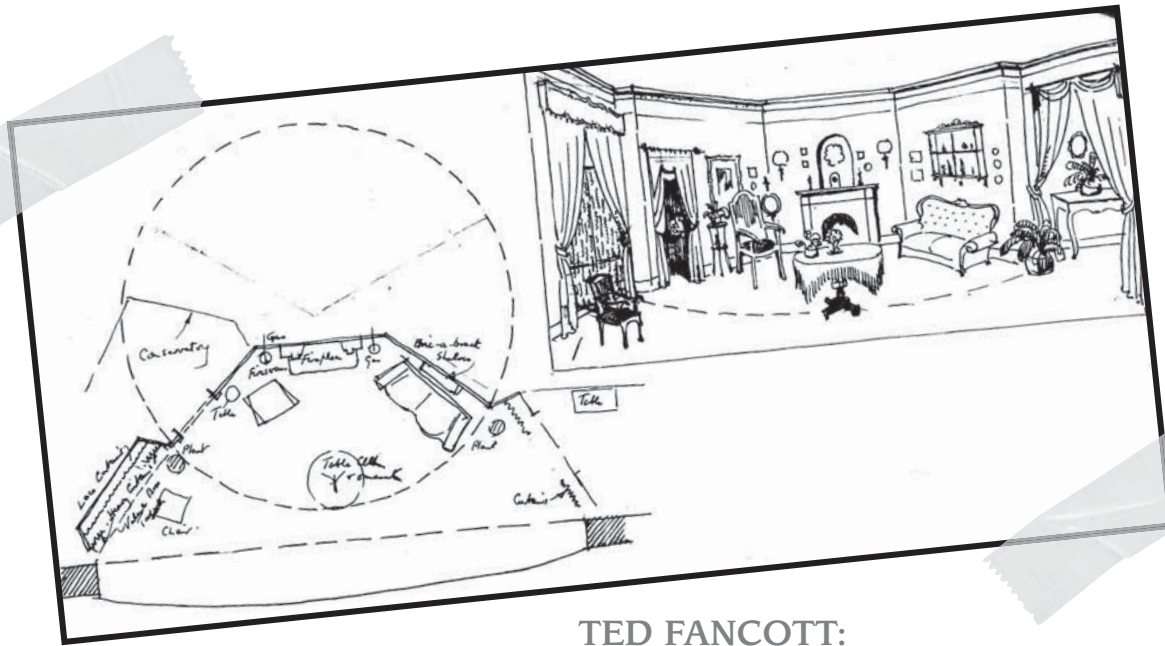
TED FANCOTT:
Sketch for revolve and
Sir Charles Dilke's Study,
"The Right Honourable Gentleman" (1968)



TED FANCOTT: Study,
"The Right Honourable Gentleman" (1968)



TED FANCOTT:
"The Three Sisters"
(1969)



TED FANCOTT:
Sketch for revolve and Mrs Rositer's Room,
"The Right Honourable Gentleman" (1968)



TED FANCOTT: Mrs Rositer's Room,
"The Right Honourable Gentleman" (1968)

OLT - 1960's

■ The Second Theatre ■

The architect for the present theatre, opened in 1972, was Ted Fancott. He had already been a set designer at OLT for more than 20 years. He ensured that the stage had a number of improved features. The growing financial strength of OLT through the 70's and 80's also meant that professional technical staff could now be hired to build and paint productions. This, in turn, attracted a wider range of volunteer designers.

The last 40 years have seen set designs at OLT that are fully comparable with those on the professional stage. They have given the theatre a reputation for the highest production values and made a major contribution towards its continuing success as one of Canada's leading community theatres.

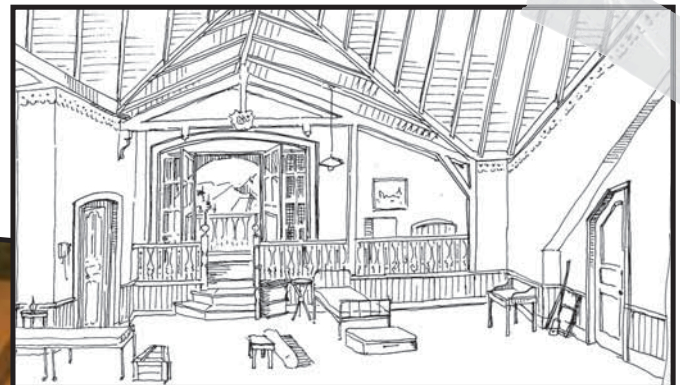


1970's

ANN GOETZ:
Sketch for
"Barefoot in the Park"
(1970)



ANN GOETZ:
Sketch for
"The Price" (1970)



TED FANCOTT:
Sketch for *"All for Mary"* (1974)

TED FANCOTT:
"All for Mary" (1974)

LESLIE HUTCHINS:
*"According to the
Evidence"*
(1975)



1980's



ED GUIGNON:
"Machinery of Government"
(1983)

DOROTHY SHAW:
"King of Hearts"
(1981)



LESLIE HUTCHINS:
"Christmas Carol"
(1982)

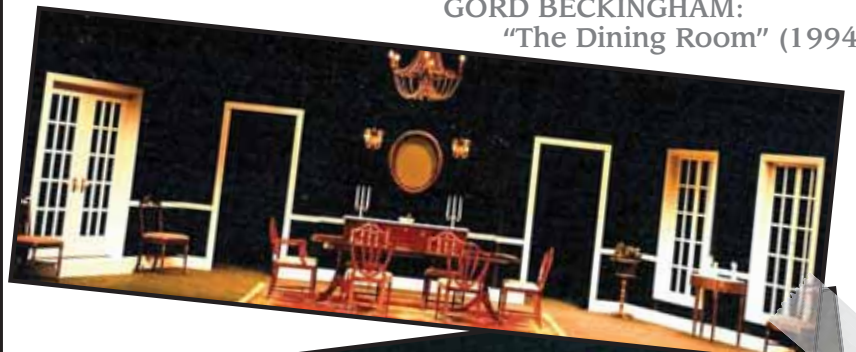
LESLIE HUTCHINS:
*"The Man Who
Came to Dinner"*
(1980)



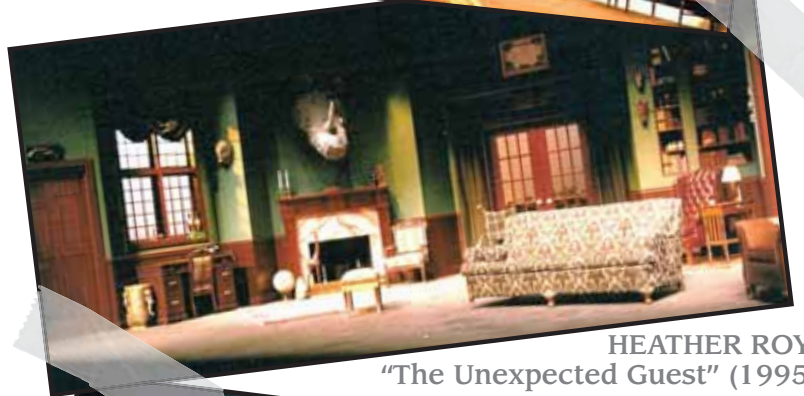
1990's



JENNIFER DONNELLY: "Charley's Aunt" (1995)



GORD BECKINGHAM:
"The Dining Room" (1994)



HEATHER ROY:
"The Unexpected Guest" (1995)



TOM PIDGEON: "Whose afraid of Virginia Woolf?"
(1999)



TOM SHIELDS:
"Gentlemen Prefer
Blondes" (1997)



ED GUIGNION:
"A Funny Thing
Happened on
the Way to
the Forum"
(1997)

2000's



DON TORNEY: *"Lion in Winter"* (2000)



ROBIN RIDDIHOUGH:
"The Wild Guys" (2004)



ANDREW HAMLIN:
"Dancing at Lughnasa" (2008)



NANCY SOLMAN:
"My Old Lady" (2008)



MARGARET CODERRE-WILLIAMS:
"The Importance of being Earnest" (2006)