



**LOOKING FOR A DESIGNER :**  
**A SHORT GUIDE FOR EMERGING DIRECTORS**

[www.theatredesign.org.uk](http://www.theatredesign.org.uk)

Registered Charity No.800638

## 1. DO YOUR RESEARCH

- What professional designs have you seen that you like?
- What did you like about them? Eg. the minimalist aesthetic, the use of materials, the colour palette, the flexibility the space offered the actors and director?

## 2. BE VISUALLY AWARE

- Attend exhibitions, gather random images that you sense have something to do with the way you think you might like to make the piece.
- Share these thoughts with a designer when you meet them and allow them space to respond and to share their own thoughts and ideas.
- You will find out a lot about whether you are potential collaborators from this process.

## 3. GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME TO LOOK FOR A DESIGNER

- As a director, your closest collaborator is likely to be your designer.
- Try and arrange to meet several designers.
- A cup of coffee and focussed time spent looking at their portfolio and asking about how they like to work will allow you to find out much more about one another than prescribing in too much detail what you think you want them to produce.

## 4. LOOK THROUGH DESIGNERS' GALLERIES ON OUR WEBSITE

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/designers-gallery/>

You will often find links to designers' own websites there where you can find out more about their work. Designers are listed on the website in the following ways :

**PROFESSIONAL** designers will have at least four years' experience, usually far more.

**GRADUATE** designers could be between 1 and 3 years out of training.

Most have trained on ACTD is now the Performance Design Education Collective Design (PDEC) recognised courses. <https://pdec.org.uk/>

You can find at list of these courses here;

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/about-courses/>

By taking this time, you can start to get a sense of the kind of work that draws you – all our tastes are different and we often respond instinctively or intuitively to what we like.

#### **4. ASSISTANT DESIGNERS**

We also have a register of Assistant Designers;

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/assistant-designers-register/>

Many graduate designers find their way into the profession by taking paid positions assisting more established designers. This means that the standard of their model-making and drafting skills is likely to be high. They may also have gained experience of working within theatre buildings liaising with wardrobe and construction teams in a way that is not possible on smaller scale productions. It also often means that they are keen to utilise their skills on projects that offer them the opportunity to make work as designers in their own right.

## 5. BE HONEST

Be clear and honest about what you are offering when you are creating your design brief. You will find a simple template at the end of this document to help you to structure that.

## 6. INVEST IN THE DESIGNER BEFORE YOU INVEST IN THE DESIGN

Designers are resourceful creatures. By investing financially in their time and knowledge you will get a more successful design, even if your production budget is modest.

You may not be in a position to be an Independent Theatre Council (ITC) approved company as yet but this is something we would recommend working towards. The ITC offer particularly clear guidelines on fees, subsistence and contracts; <http://www.itc-arts.org>

## 7. YOUR BUDGET

Always separate out the following areas of your budget in your design brief. Bear in mind that a period show is likely to be much more costly on every level than a contemporary piece where most elements of costume can be sourced from High St. stores and second-hand shops.

- Designer's fee
- Designer's expenses; Model box expenses if a model is required.
  - Travel (even travelling by tube within London adds up over a 4 week rehearsal process).
  - Subsistence (if you are asking the designer to stay away from home).
- Materials budget
  - Construction costs eg. timber, paint, hardware, fabric, fire-retardant.
- Additional labour
  - Eg. budget for a set builder, costume or prop maker.

- Transportation Is it likely the design will be built in a different place to where the show will be performed? Moving it is a cost that you should account for.

## **8. DESIGNER-MAKER**

A designer may be willing and able to do some or all of the making (in this instance your brief should say that you are looking for a designer-maker). For this to be the case you should consider offering a design fee + a weekly making rate or an additional lump sum for making so that the designer can choose to do this work themselves or offer this aspect of the work to someone else with specialist skills.

The ITC offers some clear guidelines on this:

<http://www.itc-arts.org/rates-of-pay>

## **9. CREATE A CONTRACT**

Always draw up a written contract that you both agree to.

There are very good recognised contracts offered by Equity, ITC, UK Theatre and SOLT (Society of London Theatres).

If you are unable to access these, you can contact us for further advice.

## **10. ALLOW ENOUGH TIME BEFORE REHEARSALS START TO MEET REGULARLY AND OFTEN WITH THE DESIGNER YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO WORK ON THE PROJECT WITH.**

Your whole project will benefit from spending this time developing a shared language.

We wish you every success in your search, and if you think we can help in any other way, please get in touch [admin@theatredesign.org.uk](mailto:admin@theatredesign.org.uk)

# CHECK LIST

COMPANY:

PRODUCTION:

SHORT DESCRIPTION

VENUE (S):

BUDGET:

SET:

COSTUMES:

PROPS :

DIRECTOR:

PRODUCTION MANAGER:

LIGHTING DESIGNER:

NO. OF ACTORS:

START OF REHEARSALS:

GET-IN:

PRODUCTION WEEK:

TECHNICAL REHEARSAL:

DRESS REHEARSAL:

FIRST NIGHT:

FIRST CALL FOR DESIGNER:

EXPECTED DESIGNER AVAILABILITY DURING REHEARSALS:

WHITE CARD MODEL DEADLINE OR EQUIVALENT:

FINAL MODEL DEADLINE OR EQUIVALENT:

TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS ANTICIPATED:

Before rehearsals start:

During rehearsals :

DESIGNER'S FEE: £

EXPENSES

Travel

Subsistence

Model box expenses

ADDITIONAL MAKING @ £ per week