



MSU Theatre Setting the Stage for Design & Mentorship

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In the theatre world, reviews tend to focus on the performers more than costumes, sets, or lighting. But for a recent production of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* by the *A.D. Players* at the George Theatre in Houston, Texas, theatre critics were raving about the set design by *Kirk A. Domer*, Chairperson and Professor of Scenic Design for the *MSU Department of Theatre*.



"I was completely dumbstruck by Kirk Domer's luscious – and I mean luscious – set design," said DL Groover from the *Houston Press*.

Another notable comment came from Audrey Morabito of *Broadwayworld.com*.

"It's as if a 1960s-inspired Pinterest board came to life onstage," she said. "I shed a metaphorical tear for the day the set has to be struck at the end of performances because it was a beauty. I was amazed, and so were the five or so audience members surrounding my seat who individually walked in and each gasped!"

- (left) Photo Credit: T'nia Burse
- (below) Photo credit: Michael Mullins
Photo Credits: Michael Mullins





The set design was the product of world-class faculty, teaching, mentorship and grant-funding that all originated back at Michigan State University.

Domer received grants from the College of Arts & Letters Undergraduate Research Initiative and MSU Office of the Provost of Undergraduate Education: Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity. That support enabled him to bring T’Nia Burse and Joey Lancour, both BFA in Design students in the Department of Theatre, onto the project as his assistants.

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Joey Lancour, BFA in Design Student

This was Lancour's second time joining Domer on a Houston project.

"I love these opportunities in professional theatres because nobody has to worry about classes or other academic-related things, meaning we were 100-percent focused on the production," Lancour said. "My biggest takeaway is that Chicago and New York aren't the only major cities to find full-time work in the theatre. Houston has been growing quickly and creating tons of arts opportunities."

Throughout Domer's 18 years at MSU, he has engaged dozens of student design assistants on projects around the world. In 2013, alumni Michael Mullins and his wife Jessica Mullins invited Domer to join a creative team at Stages Repertory Theatre. This relationship continues and has expanded to the A.D. Players at the George Theatre.



BFA in Design Student Joey Lancour on the set of A.D. Player's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

Domer knows the impact a mentor can have a career, having been mentored throughout his tenure at Michigan State University by Dr. George F. Peters, Dr. David Prestel, and Dr. Douglas Noverr.

"As a theatrical designer and college administrator, I have always valued the importance of mentorship," Domer said. "I have been mentored by some amazing people throughout my career including Richard Traubner from the Ohio Light Opera and Joseph Varga, Dennis Dorn, and Linda Essig from University Wisconsin-Madison. I always look for the opportunity to pay it forward to my own students."

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Kirk Domer, MSU Department of Theatre Chair and Professor of Scenic Design

Burse was tapped because Domer knew her primary interest is in scenic art. The set was very large and would require a lot of specialized painting. Burse created all the stencils that were used for various

wallpapers and was also tasked with researching materials and drafting specific pieces of the set, such as The Golden Gate Bridge seen in the background.

“Stepping outside of an educational environment, allowed me to get a feel for the independence that comes with this work,” said T’nia Burse. “Though it is very much a team effort, there comes a point where I really had to put my own individual skills to the test and believe that I was executing the designer’s vision in a positive way. I was struck by the true sense of community.”



According to Domer, that sense of community is deeply rooted in Michigan State University and the Department of Theatre. Domer and his assistants were housed by Spartan alums during their stay. The technical director, Michael Mullins, and the costume designer Kristina Miller (MFA, Theatre) are also Spartans.

Burse agreed. “On this trip alone, I was able to work with five Spartans who truly made the phrase *Spartans help Spartans* real.”

BFA in Design T’nia Burse’s Scenic Painting for
A.D. Players *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*