Discovering the Secrets of the Annex: The Scenic Design of "The Diary of Anne Frank"

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Discovering the Secrets of the Annex:  
The Scenic Design of *The Diary of Anne Frank*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

by

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Iowa State University  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This thesis describes the analysis, design, and implementation of University of Arkansas’ production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The entire process is explored and analyzed with a specific focus on the challenges the production staff faced along with creative victories that we shared when creating this production. This document comments on and explores how the facts of the story and principal location of *The Diary of Anne Frank* influenced our more abstracted world of the play.

This thesis includes the essential design documents and support materials used in the creation of the scenic design of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This includes: research images, early sketches, ground plans, renderings, paint elevations, and production photos.
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Introduction

The Diary of Anne Frank was an incredible play to work on due to its powerful story and historical relevance. This show allowed me to grow as a scenic designer due to the challenge of addressing the facts of this story while creating a theatrical environment in which to house the action.

My job was to respect the facts of this historical event, and make it accessible to a modern audience. It was important to understand the impact that the scenic design could have on the show not only in regards to an overarching theme, but in the sense of a practical and functional ground plan. To accomplish this, I did a great deal of historical research on the families that hid in the annex. I also spent numerous hours on the Anne Frank house website walking through their 3-D representation of the hiding place. Once I understood the physical context in which this story happened, I then began reading and analyzing script. This is when I truly fell in love with Anne’s story. She brings so much energy and wisdom to the play that you often forget she was only a teenager. Her thoughts on how the world should work were wise beyond her years.

After completing my formal analysis, I participated in a series of design meetings with the rest of the production staff to collaborate cohesively. Upon completion of our meetings, I could begin my initial design process where I was able to create a series of unique designs that seemed to work well with the reality of the story, while adding a beautiful, overarching theatricality to it.
The Play

Historical Context of the Play

The version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* we used was adapted by Wendy Kesselman and originally produced at the Music Box Theatre with direction by James Lapine in 1997 (Kesselman 6). This adaptation shortened the show and shed light on some of the edgier parts of Anne’s diary that weren’t included in the original 1955 play. We are presented with more of Anne’s thoughts about puberty and development as a young girl. We are also presented with the negative aspects of Anne and Edith’s relationship in the Kesselman adaptation. Although such feelings represent nothing more than typical teenage angst, Otto Frank was weary of putting anything negative about Edith in the diary, due to how it would reflect negatively on his daughters.

The original play was written in 1955 by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. It was supposed to be a stage adaptation of the book *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. This book existed because of the thoughtful Miep Gies. After the members of the annex were taken, Miep held on to the papers and notebooks that Anne had written which had been left behind by the Gestapo. She then gave these papers to Otto Frank, as he was the only one to return from the concentration camps. Upon reading his daughter’s diary, Otto Frank began sharing her stories with close relatives and friends. With their encouragement, he made an edited version public in 1947. The diary was first published with the title “Het Achterhuis,” which literally means “the house behind” or, to simplify in English, “The Secret Annex.” Since that time, the book has been translated into over 30 languages and sold around the world. Anne’s story continues to be researched by the Anne Frank foundation in Amsterdam ([annefrank.org](http://annefrank.org)). Anne first got her diary on her birthday in June of 1942 and continued to write in it until their capture in August of 1944.
Through her writing, we learn about her and the others’ experience in the secret annex.

Analysis

When using the Ingham style analysis, we are immediately asked as a designer: “Where are they?” The play is quite specific in stating, “The play takes place in the top floors of the annex to an office building in Amsterdam, Holland, during the years of World War II” (Kesselman 7). This specific setting is both a blessing and a challenge to scenic designers and directors because the story of Anne Frank is so well known. One of the biggest challenges of this story is the fact that the audience already knows the ending; so how do we make our telling of this story interesting? Theatre artists are challenged to both understand and respect the historical context in which the story took place and then present it to a modern audience through the filter of live theatre. To do this effectively, we need to get very specific by examining the source from where all this information came - Anne’s diary. She provides many clues and descriptions of the annex itself as well as the world outside of the annex. She goes into detail when describing the warehouse where her father works, which also served as the location of the secret annex. To put things into further context, we know that this is an Opekta warehouse/office at Prinsengracht 263 where they sell and store gelatin and spices for cooking purposes. When Anne describes the building, there are many levels with twist and turns throughout, creating a labyrinth of a building, making it the perfect hiding place. The entryway into the annex where they lived was on the second floor, down a hallway from a landing that also led to the storage area for the spices (annefrank.org). Anne goes on to describe the annex in more detail in her diary:

There is a steep staircase immediately opposite the entrance. On the left a tiny passage brings you into a room which was to become the Frank family’s bed-sitting room, next door a smaller room, study and bedroom for the two young ladies of the family. On the right a little room without windows containing a washbasin and a small W.C. compartment, with another door leading to Margot’s and my room. If you go up the next
flight of stairs and open the door, you are simply amazed there could be such a big light room in such and old house by the canal. There is a gas stove in this room (thanks to the fact that it was used as a laboratory) and a sink. This is now the kitchen for the Van Daan couple, besides being general living room, dining room and scullery. A tiny little corridor room will become Peter Van Daan’s apartment. Then, just as on the lower landing, there is a large attic.

From these colorful descriptions, we understand the cramped nature of the annex and that each tiny room has multiple purposes for everyone staying there. A place this small that housed as many individuals as it did for well over two years made for a difficult environment that seldom allowed anyone to ever be alone. The script also reiterates what had been said in Anne’s diary, “Light comes up to reveal the Frank’s hiding place—The Annex—crammed to the ceiling with cardboard boxes, piles of bedding, assorted furniture” (Kesselman 10). This was a cramped area with a lot of people and an assortment of found things that they could utilize to survive. Therefore, I believe Anne took such solace in her diary entries because the diary served as her way to escape. She could claim her diary as just her own and no one else could have it, making it the perfect escape. In the beginning of her diary she states, “I hope I should be able to confide in your completely, as I have never been able to do with anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support and comfort to me” (Frank 1). This is why her diary was so detailed and full of truth, she could trust in it and pour her whole heart and soul into it.

The next important question from the Ingham Analysis is to determine in the script when did all of this happen? We know that the Frank family went into hiding on July 6th, 1942, the day after Margot Frank got her summons to go to a German work camp (Frank 13). They stayed in hiding for a little over two years and were arrested on August 4th, 1944 (annefrankhouse.org). It is important to understand the progression of time during the play. Throughout the show, we see the passing of holiday events with Meip’s New Year’s spice cake, and the growing of the
children with Anne’s new shoes. We also see the development that Anne starts to go through as she quickly shows signs of becoming a young woman. Looking more globally at the historical context of the “when” of the show, we recognized Germany was in a state of unrest since the end of World War I; as Hitler rose to power the safety of Jewish people declined greatly. Originally, the Frank family had lived in Frankfurt Germany; however, after Hitler took over as the leader, they became worried and tried to find a way to immigrate to the United States, but they ended up moving to Amsterdam. Subsequently, World War II broke out on May 10th, 1940 when Germany invades the Netherlands. This action caused the Franks to start planning to find a place where they could hide from the Nazis (annefrank.org).

This resilient group of people that hid for 2 years among Nazi occupied countries, were truly astounding but one of the most influential people of the group was Otto Frank. He is the patriarch and leader to the group of 8. Mr. Frank, or Pim as Anne likes to call him, is a fair and strong man that loves and protects his family very much. He serves as the leader of this group because of his intelligence and strength, while also being extraordinarily thankful and appreciative of anyone who helps him. He is a man that is respected by everyone including Mr. Van Daan, who explains, “Your husband helped me when I first came to Amsterdam, knowing no one, unable to speak the language. I can never repay him for that” (Kesselman 15). Otto is also a great father. When he is stern to Anne about not going downstairs for pencils, he makes the situation better by giving Anne his precious fountain pen to write. Not only is he fair in his parenting skills, he is also kind-hearted with the rest of the group. When hesitation arises in taking in Mr. Kaler, Otto insists on taking him in, because “Even if we can save one person, we must” (Kesselman 28). He is a true leader even after chaos ensues with the burglar when he insists that they “can’t panic. If we panic, we are lost.” He is the glue that holds this group
Edith Frank, Otto’s wife is a caring mother who means well most of the time. Her character is perplexing because we see her though Anne’s filter. As any young teenage girl, Anne struggles to create a healthy and loving relationship with her mother. Anne even goes as far to say, “As far as I am concerned, Mother can go jump in a lake” (Kesselman 29). One can also see the struggle that Edith must go through with parenting her two very different daughters. At times, Anne can be a lot to handle under the stressful situation in which they are living whether it is arguing with the Van Daan’s or teasing Peter, Anne has an aggressive personality. Edith tries to get Anne to be like Margot when anything goes wrong. This of course causes tension between mother and daughter. There are times when Anne feels unloved by her mother even though that is truly the opposite of reality. Edith has a lot of external pressure put on her while also trying to be a good parent. She struggled with the way the Van Daans sometimes acted and would get frustrated quickly. “No room, no privacy— for any of us!” (Kesselman 27) Although Edith is seen at times as being high strung, she cares deeply for both of her daughters. This is revealed especially when Edith comforts Anne after her nightmare and insists that everything is going to be all right for Anne while cradling her.

Margot is a quiet yet strong and smart woman. She constantly must deal with the force of nature that is her sister. She sees the toll that it takes on her mother, and I think that is one of the reasons she is so calm and quiet most of the time. She cares for her mother and tries to make her feel better when Anne gets short with Edith, “I’m more like you. It’s not that she doesn’t love you” (Kesselman 35). Her mother adores her and goes on to describe Margot as “courteous. She keeps her distance and they respect her for it” (Kesselman 26). In the beginning of the show she is portrayed as a constant character compared to Anne because Margot is so quiet and demure.
Mr. Van Daan asks Anne, “Why can’t you be quiet like your sister, Margot?” (Kesselman 26). The two girls bicker like you would expect sisters to do, but near the end they are seen more as compatriots against the prying adults. Margot cares for and looks out for Anne like a big sister when she goes on her “dates” with Peter. Once the sisters have a better understanding of one another, Anne, Margot, and Peter spend time together to talk about life and act as normal teenagers. Margot is the quintessential big sister. Even though they may argue, Margot is always there to love and support Anne.

Mr. Van Daan is a stern businessman that expects his son to do well and live up to his standards. He becomes grouchy when he is deprived of his cigarettes and when he is called out on being wrong. His relationship with Mrs. Van Daan is periodically strained, and he even tells her to “shut up” at one point when being chastised about using all their money to buy cigarettes. Mr. Van Daan also creates tension by trying to sell Mrs. Van Daan’s precious fur coat. With actions like these, it is easy to compare him to the other father in the household, Mr. Frank. It further illustrates that Anne saw her father, Mr. Frank, as a strong and positive light.

Mrs. Petronella Van Daan is a slightly vain mother who is stuck remembering what life used to be like. She loves extravagant things along with the memory of her dear father. When describing her father, she says, “He always bought me the best that money could buy” (Kesselman 23). Although she can be seen as an egocentric and irritating woman who at times loves her precious things like her fur coat and chamber pot very much, she is still a mother who loves her family even more than her possessions. Even when Mr. Van Daan is caught stealing bread she is there for her husband and tells him to “Hold onto me instead” when he is too hungry (Kesselman 50). When Peter is hard on himself for not doing well in French, Mrs. Van Daan insists that “You are not hopeless” and pursues different possibilities of helping her son
Peter Van Daan is a young teenage full of angst. His angst is seen at the very beginning of the show when he insists on immediately ripping off his star when they first arrive in the Annex. He explains to Anne, “Now I don’t have to be branded.” (Kesselman 16). Anne then describes Peter as “The most infuriating boy I’ve ever met!” (Kesselman 22). As the show goes on, we see Peter grow and develop into a young man as he opens up to Anne. He talks about his vulnerabilities with her and sees her as a friend and ally. She brings out the best in Peter, and he brings out positive traits in her as well. Their friendship is something that provides Anne comfort when tensions are at their highest in the depth of winter in the Annex.

Miep Gies is the cheerful glue that holds everyone together. Her selflessness plays a pivotal role in making sure that the families survive in the annex. She continues to reassure the Franks and Van Daans, “Please don’t worry. We will do everything we can to help you.” (Kesselman 13) Although she cannot provide everything for them, she tries very hard. She is also a source of news and excitement for the girls in the house. She tells them of her engagement to Jan and how they go out on dates. She is an important lifeline to all the members of the annex. She provides them with food, supplies, and information. Edith Frank says it the best, “Meip never fails us.” (Kesselman 27)

Mr. Kraler is a straightforward man who respects Otto Frank immensely. He is also pivotal in the survival of those living in the annex. Edith even says, “without them we couldn’t live.” (Kesselman 30) Kraler tries to make light of most situations. We find out that he has been hiding some of the horrors from the outside world when Mr. Dussel comes to live with the group. Mr. Dussel explains how families are being taken left and right to go on trains to work camps. Morgot comments, “I like it better the way Kraler tells it” (Kesselman 31).
Alfred Dussel is a grumpy, shy dentist who, at times, has an awkward sense of humor. He ends up being Anne’s roommate for most of their stay in the annex. His tension with Anne causes numerous arguments and outbursts that usually result in Anne getting in trouble. Through his hard-shelled exterior, we also see a man who is scared and desperately wants to see his fiancé again. Charlotte is the one thing he wants when the others name off the first things they would want when they are finally liberated. He is nervous around others and is a little shaken when he first arrives and doesn’t know what he is to do when Anne is in their room. When he finds himself around the others, his coping mechanism is to make awkward jokes that are usually at Anne’s expense. This is specifically seen during the Hanukkah scene. Mr. Dussel is the odd man out in most places because he isn’t affiliated with any family in the annex.

The true heroine of our story is Anne Frank. We see this young girl blossom into a young woman as her ideas about life and humanity grow and develop as she does. One of the most striking characteristics about Anne is her ability to bring light to a situation that is so dire. We see this in the beginning of the play as soon as she enters the annex. The rest of the family members are unconvinced that hiding out in the annex will be met with much success; however, Anne goes on to describe being in the annex, “Like being on vacation in some strange pension or something. An adventure — romantic and dangerous at the same time!” (Kesselman 12) With her high energy the audience also experiences some of her more dramatic lows; when becoming upset about going into hiding, Anne describes her situation as “feeling like a songbird who’s wings have been ripped off and keeps hurling itself against the bars of its dark cage… but then I remember the Jews who are not in hiding, and I know we live in paradise.” (Kesselman 19) As we fall in love with the enjoyable Anne Frank, it saddens us to hear her talk about what she could have been, especially when she says, “I am going to be a famous writer or singer or dancer one
day! (Kesselman 26). Her passion for life is infectious. Late in the show she gets very excited upon hearing about people collecting journals and diaries of the Dutch people after the war. After hearing this on the radio, Anne starts refining and editing her diary. As a reader of her work, you can get lost in her excitement for life and how she could live it full of adventure. In addition to her bright personality, we see incredible intelligence and insight for a 13-year-old, especially when she talks about the war. Some of my favorite lines Anne has is when she is talking about Hitler and the Germans, and she says, “Fine specimens of humanity, those Germans, and to think I’m actually one of them! No, that’s not true, Hitler took our nationality away long ago” (Kesselman 34). In conclusion, Anne Frank’s empathetic ability to see the light in people when being persecuted most of her life is incredible. One of the last lines of the show spoken by Anne before she and the others are taken is:

   It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart (Kesselman 67).

This is the true beauty of Anne Frank. In my opinion, this is the real reason that her story out of millions became so popular. She was a great writer who made you fall in love with her and the rest of the Frank family. It is impossible to look at her and not see an incredible person who was so strong and smart at such a young age. She continues to be truly empowering.

Once we have looked at all the characters, the Ingham analysis directs us to ask: “What happened before the play started?” I think it is important to look not only at the play but also at historical events because they play such an important factor in setting up this story. It is critical to combine a bit of the Frank family history plus the events that led up to World War II. To begin with the Frank family, Anne Frank was born on June 12, 1929 in the German city of Frankfurt am Main, where her father’s family lived for generations. After Hitler rose to power in Germany
in 1933, the Franks decided to move to Holland. Otto Frank started a new business and the girls attend new schools. (annefrank.org) Meanwhile in Germany, Adolf Hitler becomes Führer in 1934 and soon after violates the Treaty of Versailles by introducing military conscription in 1935. With numerous threats against the Jews made by Hitler and threat of war in Europe increasing, Otto and his family try to emigrate to England or the USA but their attempts fail. The Nazis sign 'Pact of Steel' with Italy and the Soviet Union in 1939, and on September 1st, 1939 Germany invades Poland. Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany, which marks the beginning of the Second World War. (historyplace.com) Slowly, the Nazi regime starts to take over Europe and finally invades Holland. Anne describes the event:

   Hitler invaded Holland on May 10th, 1940, a month before my 11th birthday. Five days later the Dutch surrendered, the Germans arrived—and the trouble started for the Jews (Kesselman 10).

Throughout this process, many Jews were persecuted for their beliefs and hunted down. At first, their rights were taken away. Anne describes the start of this process from her perspective:

   Father was forced to give up his business. We couldn’t use streetcars, couldn’t go to the theatre or movies anymore, couldn’t be out in the tree after 8 PM, couldn’t even sit in our own gardens! We had to turn in our bicycles; no beaches, no swimming pools, no libraries— we couldn’t even walk on the sunny side of the streets! (Kesselman 11).

After these events, Jewish families started getting letters to work at labor camps. Margot got her letter 10 days before the Frank family planned on escaping; however, they decided that it was better to go at that moment rather than have Margot be taken.

   After considering the events that take place before the start of the play, the Ingham analysis now asks us to look at the story as a whole. The main conflict driving this play is the struggle to survive as a Jew. The members of the annex took a big risk by staying right in the middle of Amsterdam while so many Jews escaped to other countries. A lot of Jewish people didn’t believe this conflict would last as long as it did. The characters of this show must deal with the pressure
of being discovered along with the more immediate task of surviving day to day in a small annex. This task is made even harder with 7 other people and food sources that were quickly becoming scarce. The height of this conflict is illustrated during the Hanukkah scene. You see all the characters trying to celebrate their religion only to be met with terror when they know someone has discovered them in the annex. After intermission, we see the toll that hiding for a year has taken on the members of the Annex. However, through all this turmoil, there is still light to all this sadness.

As Anne starts to develop into a young woman, whether it is her excitement about getting her period or her insight into the war, her joy is a seed of light in the darkness that surrounds these families. On top of it all, we see Anne’s relationship with Peter begin to develop. Their relationship, along with news of the British invading, are happy and lighthearted moments that lead us to believe that this family can survive. With a lighthearted scene that has everyone happy and eating strawberries, the harsh reality of the world presents itself. The members of the annex are discovered and taken prisoner by the Nazis. The show then ends with a hallowing monologue that serves as an epilogue, as Otto Frank explains the sad events that happened to the members of the annex after they were taken.

Overall the theme of this play is one of forgiveness and understanding. Throughout this play, we see this at both a micro and macro level through the character of Anne. Even though she can be quick to judge or become upset, she is also quick to forgive. She has multiple moments where she is completely selfless just because she chooses to be; from giving homemade gifts at Hanukkah, to forgiving her mother and comforting her, Anne continually shows forgiveness. On a more macro level, this is perfectly summed up in one of the last things that Anne says in the play: “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart” (Kesselman 67).
Despite her rights getting taken away, being forced into hiding and knowing that some of her friends and family were harmed because of ignorant people afraid of her religion, Anne thinks that there is still good in the world. That is truly inspiring.
The Process

Early Design Meetings

Immediately after I read this play, I was exceptionally excited to design this show. I felt a strong connection to Anne’s voice and felt that we could do something very special with this play; Kate Frank, the director, agreed. She wanted to focus on the reality of the script we were using. In this adaptation, we see more of Anne’s faults, which makes her more of a real teenager rather than an iconic character. Furthermore, we see the effects and destruction of the Nazis as they enter the stage with guns drawn, further heightening the terror during the moment of their capture. Illustrating the immediacy of the family’s danger was important to the telling of this story according to our director, Kate Frank. During early design meetings, she also emphasized the importance of time, loneliness, claustrophobia, and vermin, along with the idea of there being a clear definition of being “outside” or “inside.” With her concerns and my ideas in mind, I started to gather several research images and began the sketching process for developing my design.

When I begin my creative process, one of the first things I do is create both a 2-D and a 3-D art responses to the show. Without the hindrance of theatre machinery and conventions, I read the play, then respond artistically to what I think the show is about from a purely emotional response. This exercise allows me an uninhibited response to the tone of the play without worry about how to create the scenic environment. (APPENDIX A5 and 6) These artistic responses led me in the direction of muted color tones that had a lot of texture in them. I was also drawn to the idea of rain and how it had a cleansing property. From this point, I went back to my research and began collecting images associated with what I had created. This play (and my research) also had a theme that reflects humans as being caged and trapped animals. I started looking more at cages
and the idea of vertical lines, which lead me to stripes. This visual vocabulary seemed fitting for our production not only because the families are caged inside of this annex, but also supported due to the quality and styling of the “uniforms” the Nazis made the Jews wear while they were being held in the internment camps. (APPENDIX- A3)

After my initial research and sketching process, I was reminded to look at the play as a “theatrical interpretation” of an authentic location rather than a historical reproduction of the Annex. It was important to understand and recognize that this was a real place in a real time; however, I still wanted to have a strong opinion as a designer. With Kate’s excitement about the research images and positive reinforcement towards initial ideas I was more confident about having a strong metaphorical voice. I then started to dig into the history of the annex. I spent a lot of time online going through the Anne Frank House Museum’s website, where they have a 3-D digital representation of what the annex looks like. I learned a lot about the specifics of the place from the molding to the cupboards to the furniture pieces. Upon completion of the historical research component, I coupled those images with my artistic responses to create visual collages to share with the director.

When I first met with Kate to start discussing my ideas for the scenic environment, she was attracted to the caged and textured research I had assembled. We started looking at photos of abandoned places such as libraries and homes. (APPENDIX A-4) We were both drawn to the fact this research showed history and decay, but there was still something beautiful about the images. These seemed to resonate with the show perfectly in the sense that Anne was a curious girl with a beautiful imagination; she was the beauty that brought light and happiness to a world that was constantly terrifying and cold.

Also, in the first meeting Kate talked with me about the practical use of the space. She had
looked back at the script again and felt that it was important to keep the actors on the stage the entire time. She said that staging the show with the actors always trapped on stage made it feel more “real.” It was critical to Kate that the audience bear witness to the characters as they went about their daily lives and tasks. With this being said, Kate wanted each of the 8 characters to have their own individual spaces where they could “camp out”. At the end of this meeting I become a little nervous in trying to figure out 8 different spaces, while also identifying a place for the kitchen, bathroom, dining area, attic, and entrance that led up into the annex. In one of our previous design meetings we had discussed the idea of creating a three-story set to accommodate all of the necessary locations. We quickly abandoned this idea once we realized the scale was too big and extravagant for our interpretation of the play. We were more interested in highlighting the sense of claustrophobia in which these characters lived. With a new understanding of the kind of space we were looking to create, I began the formal process of developing a workable ground plan.

I began by working in the drafting program, Vectorworks, so I could get a better understanding of the sizes of various furniture pieces, room configurations, and stair placements. One of the first challenges I faced for our production was that all the characters were going to have to sleep in beds. Beds take up a lot of real estate on a set. We see the family members wake up or go to sleep on multiple occasions in The Diary of Anne Frank, and since we were going for very realistic portrayal of the character's daily lives, I knew that we would need the beds. I decided to scale the beds to a smaller, yet believable size. I used beds that were either small army style cots or bundles of bedding; these were small but still made dramaturgical sense. We knew that the Franks and Van Daans smuggled away furniture pieces quietly and quickly, so we already knew that they would need to be small and mismatched.
With all this in mind I started cutting up scaled pieces of paper that I could rearrange on the
ground plan of our theatre experimenting with different configurations. Once I found a
combination I liked, I drafted it in Vectorworks and save it to share with the production team at a
later date. (APPENDIX B3 and 4)

I looked at numerous configurations--one with the annex stairs in the middle of the stage
ascending upstage with the rooms on either side, which was a clear reflection of what the annex
looked like in reality. Unfortunately, this kind of layout was narrow, and elongated in its ground
plan, which is the opposite of what is preferable for an arrangement on the very wide University
Theatre stage. (APPENDIX B3) I then tried moving the stairs to the upstage side of the set where
the audience would only see the idea of the stairs rather than seeing the entire staircase. This
solved one special issue by opening up the downstage playing areas. I also played with the idea
of having an elevated kitchen/dining room space with the idea of the annex stairs coming from
below our stage pit. (APPENDIX B4)

With these ground plans in process, I started sketching on paper and using a 3D modeling
program called SketchUp to visualize the space in a more 3-Dimensional way. (APPENDIX B1
and 2) After developing a few of these ground plans into 3-D SketchUp models, I met with my
scene design mentor, Michael Riha, to share my development. After looking at the ground plans
along with the 3-D models, he reminded me that it was important to remember to look at the
show more abstractly, and to not be tied down by the historical context of the annex. He
encouraged me to go back to some of my original evocative research and apply it to the ground
plans I had already created. At this point I started applying the idea of Anne’s “Light” as lots and
lots of exposed lightbulbs; these light bulbs could be arranged to create the roofline of the annex.
(APPENDIX B1) It was at this stage of my process that I discovered I really liked the idea of the
walls of the annex becoming a literal cage at moments of the show where the characters felt most trapped. (APPENDIX B2)

After developing the “light bulb” and “cage” idea further, I decided to share these new sketches with Kate. She responded positively to the idea of having the stairs to the annex coming up from the pit. She was pleased with the fact that it could make the rest of the ground plan more open and could give the sense of height to the annex without making the set tall, which tends to obstruct sight lines for the audience. At this meeting, we also became intrigued with the idea of adding a sky drop to the far upstage portion of the set. Anne often mentions in her diary her longing to go outside and feel the wind or rain on her face. I wanted to incorporate the idea of how Anne saw the outside world. She saw the adventure and excitement of outside and what better way to represent that then a beautiful, abstract sky drop. Overall, Kate was pleased with the process. However, when questioned further about the reality of the space vs. creating an abstracted scenic environment, more discussion was needed. We concluded that this play was more of a memory play that we were seeing through the filter of Anne, which allowed our environment to have more “magical” or abstract elements seen in the design. We wanted reality to take the lead with the character’s actions and dialogue.

With these new thoughts in mind, I went back and continued sketching and building several white models to fully understand the space and how the actors could move through it. I kept using walls that had a translucent property to them so they could be lit from behind to reveal the wall’s framing and create a caged look. This idea was very important to the process of the lighting designer, Shawn Irish who liked the idea and said it was possible to achieve a cage-like quality if the walls were lit from behind. At this point, I also began to experiment with levels for each of the rooms to give more individualized spaces while also varying the vertical planes. Kate
and I discussed how it was acceptable to create different levels separated by only a step or two to suggest a wall or change in plane. The suspension of disbelief was on our side in this theatre setting so a close adherence to architectural reality was not necessary. I then created a final white model with translucent walls that could appear solid if lit from the front and translucent if lit from behind. It also had three levels downstairs. These levels were the kitchen/living room, Anne’s room and then the Frank’s Room. Upstairs was the attic, the Van Daan’s and Peter’s room. (APPENDIX C3) When I met with Kate to share my development, her primary concern was one of practical space. Approximately 65% of the show takes place in the kitchen/common room, so she requested that this be on the most ground level of the set and the largest playing space. With these notes, I integrated them into my following revisions to achieve a final design.

**Approach**

In this intensely personal play, we wanted to create a world that reflected the reality of what the group was going through; we also wanted to show that horrific world through Anne’s eyes. This was represented with the over-crowded and layered layout of the space. The rooms they live in are not perfectly rectangular or organized, further enhancing the claustrophobic and cluttered state in which they were living. There is furniture strewn about the entire set which helps create nooks and crannies to hide and collect pieces of their lives within the annex home. I wanted the set to feel layered by both the character’s personalities and their surroundings. We could create 8 individual spots that the characters could claim as their own, while still maintaining the common spaces of a kitchen, water closet, living area, and attic. The staircase leading up to the attic continued a similar line as the stairs that led out of the pit plugs in the floor. By placing the steps up to the annex in the pit, we created an entrance that had a sense of
secrecy and enabled us to position the set lower on our stage. These decisions allowed the director to focus on the importance of the story and the intimacy of the scenes.

To achieve the cage-like quality, we built the support walls of the set out of 2”x4” stud walls covered in a texture and painted tyvek. When the walls were lit from the front they looked like solid surfaces; however, when lit from the back, the 2”x4” framing created a shadow that looked very similar to a skeletal jail cell. The backlit cell-like walls emphasized the feeling of entrapment. These moments happened when the characters feel especially caged by what is happening to them in their lives. A lot of these sequences coincide with certain voiceovers by Anne. Other instances during the play that we chose to accentuate the cage-like quality of the walls was when the burglar is found, during Anne’s nightmare, and ultimately, the moment in which they are found and taken by the Nazis.

The texture that was put on the walls was reminiscent of the textures that Kate and I had originally found with the photos of the abandoned library. (APPENDIX A4) We wanted the deterioration to be present to show age, not only in the annex, but in the story. This is a story that has been told and shared numerous times, and it is not the only one of its kind. There are thousands of holocaust stories just like Anne’s that portray the bravery of those who protected the innocent. My intention of utilizing numerous layers of peeling paper was a way for our production to pay homage to the numerous stories of the thousands of holocaust victims that have been buried on top of one another.

Another important element of this set was the sky drop. This wasn’t a traditional sky by any means, but I felt as though we needed to have something to combine both the abstract with the reality of the story. The idea for this specific drop came out of the idea of asking the question: “How would a sky look like in Anne’s world?” Our sky was more of an artistic
expression of a sky that reflected Anne’s romantic and adventurous side. She tried to see her
time in the annex as more of an adventure, so it was important to reflect her bright spirit
somewhere in the set. The sky drop was where we found Anne’s spirit. Her personality could fill
a room so I wanted it to fill the sky of our set with it.

Although there is a looming, dismal sense of despair hanging over the show, it was
important to maintain a sense of light that is in Anne’s view of everything she saw. She brought
light and joy to this space and saw the annex as her playground. There is beauty to the story she
tells along with all the other stories that have been told in relation to the holocaust. That is why
they cover the walls in such a way that we as audience members are just seeing glimpses, little
bits of the larger story of their and other members of the holocaust’s lives.

Implementation

I created all the scenic drafting and paint elevations after final decisions were made and
approved. (APPENDIX F1 and G1-4) These drawings were reviewed by Weston Wilkerson, the
technical director, and by Susan Crabtree, the charge artist and properties manager. Weston
didn’t have many changes for me to consider; however, for structural purposes, he wanted more
horizontal braces in the framing of the skeletal walls. We settled on creating more of a straight
line horizontally across that still looked like a cage but had a rib-like effect to it. Scenic artist
Susan Crabtree’s only concern was with the use of Tyvek because she had never worked with it
before. I explained my reasons why I loved the paper effect that it had and how it was also very
durable. She even suggested that we change the original texture idea because it was a bit too
busy for the space and we didn’t want to distract from the most important part, the story. After
considering this option, we created a subtle textural deterioration for the walls.
When it came to the rehearsal process, the scenic design aspect went relatively smoothly. Our biggest problem was the incredibly long list of hand properties and furniture items. Not only were there numerous objects, but they all also had to be appropriate to the time period. We researched several very specific furniture items, and Susan found a period stove and settee on eBay that worked very well for our show. Both were beautiful pieces that helped establish the time period. We were doing great with props until the final designer run when we had all the final props and furniture in place. It was at this moment when we held a lengthy discussion about the exact placement of the settee. Due to its size, it was blocking too much of what was happening in the Franks’ room, especially with Margot sleeping on the floor--so Kate and I started to rearrange the furniture in an effort to open up sight lines for the Franks’ room. Once we moved the settee closer to the wood stove that was positioned downstage of the Franks room, everything fell into place. The rest of the pieces we moved around so we could visually see what was happening everywhere. By rearranging the scenic pieces, we were able to eliminate an extra chair, freeing up some much-needed playing space.

We then began the technical rehearsals. Overall it was a relatively painless process. Much of the preparation was handled prior to tech, which afforded me the opportunity to see an almost completed set from the very first technical rehearsal. I was able to take pages of notes that addressed the finer details regarding furniture, props, and paint notes further enhancing the quality of the finish. The luxury of having an almost finished set at the start of the technical rehearsals was exceptionally helpful for me. Having an entire week to fine tune the set makes the difference between an amateur looking set, and a professionally detailed set. An example of this was when I discovered that the audience was able to see a wall surface that I thought was out of sight lines, and, due to the extra time, we were able to put an extra brick facade on the side of
both the kitchen and Anne’s bedroom platform that I believe really helped tie the entire set together. By showing the exterior brick of the building it let in a part of the outside world closer to the ground. We also added some crate shelving in Anne’s bedroom as her room looked a bit bare in comparison to the rest of the set. This helped establish the cluttered feel of the set without being too messy.

One of the biggest challenges I had during tech was being the only student on the creative staff. Up until this point I was treated as an equal in the room. Tech can be an extraordinarily stressful time for everyone because it is such a quick process with a lot of elements happening at once. Another challenge I faced was a feeling of disconnect in communication with the lighting designer. The concept of the glowing walls was discussed very early in the design process. The lighting designer, Shawn Irish, agreed to pursue this effect but wanted to discuss it further. We had a couple of meetings about both the technical and metaphorical stipulations in regard to when and how the walls would turn translucent. I then identified all the moments in the script where I believed this effect could take place and communicated them to Shawn. Initially he was worried that doing this effect too often might become a distraction during the show. Another concern was that if we lit the back of the walls too often, it would lose some of its “magic.” I agreed so we narrowed it down to 6 moments that he could choose from during the tech process. He originally chose just 2 at the beginning of tech. The end product included 2 big moments and then one smaller caged moment. I wish we could have had 1 or 2 bigger moments with the caged effect. I believe that this could have happened if I had been more confident with my communication to the lighting designer during tech week. It was different working with a lighting designer that I didn’t see every day at both class and work and who I could easily bounce ideas off of due to proximity. Up until now I had worked with only student lighting
designers, who were always very eager to push the boundaries of our designs and were constantly available. With this process, I just learned that I had to be much more succinct and direct with my communication.

Reflection

Overall, I enjoyed this process and learned a great deal from it. I feel as though this show pushed me to become a more mature set designer. This show forced me to pay attention to every decision I was making. There were so many things that mattered; whether it be dimensions of the giant platforms of the second level or the fabric of the blanket I wanted on the settee, it all mattered. Each of these tiny decisions had to be made to create a whole cohesive and mature scenic design.

This show taught me about the importance of a ground plan and how much it can truly impact the story telling. This was my first true box set. It was a constant challenge to remind myself that everything stayed on stage all the time – including the actors, which meant everything had to work for the entire show at all times. It was important for me to take as much time as was necessary when making numerous white models for me to fully understand the ramifications of the ground plan I was creating. The ground plan is such a powerful tool that dictates all the movement of the show. Traffic patterns, actor relationships, and tension are all predicated on a strong ground plan. Some of my favorite moments of this show were being able to see the set come together as the actors worked with it. They used the set to their advantage and committed to making it their home. I learned how cohesive both the director and designer have to be to create a world in which actors can just live in it easily. It is important because their characters are a part of the sculptural whole as well.
Along with specificity, providing functional and nonintrusive masking for the set is crucial. I learned that as a designer you really must plan out exactly where masking goes in relation to your set prior to committing to the design. It can quickly turn into a delicate situation if every sightline is not checked beforehand. I faced this challenge with the sides of this set and we ended up having to create more of an exterior facade to the house than I originally planned. Masking should not be left until the last thing under any circumstance.

Designing *The Diary of Anne Frank* also taught me the importance of confidence. I tend to have the issue of letting things go that are important to make someone else’s life easier. I think that it is incredibly important to listen to other people and their concerns, but it is also important to stand up for yourself and your work when you believe it is in the best interest of the design. This is a lesson I will apply to all of my future work because not everyone is going to want to take the time to listen.

Designing this show also reminded me that it is important to find your way to loving, or at least respecting the story that you are designing. At first I was skeptical about doing this show because I thought it was just going to be this restrictive box set that had been done a million times before. After starting the research and subsequent readings of the play, I soon came to realize that it was hard not to be in awe of Anne Frank and her incredibly humbling story. It is hard not to be struck by the monumental history and impact of this story. Even though this story happened over 70 years ago, it is still incredibly relevant. Producing *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 2016 was important because it came at a very important time in our history as a nation. Through this play we learn the importance of forgiveness and kindness. Anne Frank is a great example of these human quality. She makes mistakes and gets mad and frustrated with others, but she always finds a way to bring joy back into their lives. I think everyone can take a lesson from that.
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C1: Preliminary White Model - Elevated Kitchen

C2: Preliminary White Model - Wall Test
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C4: Preliminary White Model- Texture Added
D1: Final Rendering

E2: Final ¼”=1’0” Model
F1: Ground Plan
G1: Paint Elevation - Downstairs Walls

Note: The walls will be covered in Tyvek, where they can be textured and added to with book pages and more paper. The whole process should still be able to let light through/see the bars behind the wall. Paper texture talk to Kiah to figure out a good sample for this process.

Research image for wall texture

Down Stairs Kitchen Walls
The Diary of Anne Frank
Scenic Designer: Kiah Kayser
Scale: 1/2"=1'0"

G2: Paint Elevation - Sky Drop

Sky Drop
The Diary of Anne Frank
Scenic Designer: Kiah Kayser
Scale: 3/8"=1'0"
G3: Paint Elevation - Upstairs Walls

Note: Top 3/16" of the wall treatment should be organically ripped in this general configuration.

Upstairs Bedroom Walls
The Diary of Anne Frank
Scenic Designer: Kiah Kayser
Scale: 1/2" = 10'

G4: Paint Elevation - Floor

Floor
The Diary of Anne Frank
Scenic Designer: Kiah Kayser
Scale: 3/8" = 10'
H1: Drop Painting in Progress

H2: Building Progress
I1: Anne’s Discussion

I2: Hanukkah Presents
I3: Miep Visits

I4: After the Capture
15: Anne’s Nightmare

16: Strawberry Scene
I7: A Winter Meal

I8: Post-Show