

Transforming the Czech Republic into 17th-century England



State corridor (studio set) [Photograph: Ian Bailie]

Award-winning production designer Sarah Greenwood (*The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall*, *This Year's Love*, *Nature Boy* and *Bodily Harm*) had the mammoth task of transforming parts of the Czech Republic into the world of King Charles II.

"The brief from the director, Joe [Wright], and producer, Kate Harwood, was that we should 'create our own world,'" says Sarah Greenwood. "Having worked previously with Joe on *Nature Boy* and *Bodily Harm*, I understood that what he wanted was not to recreate the traditional heritage piece using ubiquitous locations.

"We decided to use an abandoned Daewoo car factory in Letnany, outside Prague, as a studio in which to build the interiors of Whitehall Palace, and to build our London Streets, Parliament and the Banqueting House exterior into a ruined castle we discovered, called Tocnik, in Bohemia. Next, we had to find believable locations for the scenes set in Oxford, Tunbridge Wells and Newmarket," says Greenwood. "Our biggest worry was whether the

frozen, grey Czech countryside would ever go green. As we started shooting in April, it blossomed, almost overnight, into something that seemed lushly English.

"The main set in Letnany was designed with the American series *The West Wing* in mind. We wanted characters to be able to march around the set. There was a deliberate decision to give a confused sense of geography, which would help with the scale.

"The half-size recreation of Inigo Jones's Banqueting House, which is the one part of the palace still standing today, was a big challenge. Many people's favourite part of the set was Charles's quarters, a series of linked rooms which is based around the beautiful rooms initiated by Sir Christopher Wren at Hampton Court. These were, in fact, built in 1690, so the architecture of the composite set is truly stretched," says Greenwood. "The splendour of the Court world had to be thrown into relief by the grim and desperate world of London pushing at its gates.

Cont'd page 28



*Interior Whitehall Palace (studio set)
Charles II's quarters*



*Interior Whitehall Palace (studio set)
Queen Catharine's quarters*



Interior Banqueting House (studio set)



*Exterior Whitehall Palace (Tocnik Castle)
London streets and houses*



*Exterior Whitehall Palace (Tocnik Castle)
Holbein Gate and Banqueting House*

Photographs by Ian Bailie (Supervising Art Director)

“Catharine of Braganza’s quarters have an almost monastic quality. The design was influenced by her Portuguese heritage – very much the antithesis of the louche, decadent informality of the Elizabethan rooms designed for Barbara Villiers. Various Italian Bacchanalian images were used in Barbara’s quarters. This captured the character, atmosphere and the essence of the scenes.

“A strong visual aspect of the Whitehall set was the use of painted walls. This was an actual style from the period with the works of artists such as Antoni Verrio, a favoured artist of Charles II.

“Each room reflected the personality, vagaries or events in Charles’s life. This resulted in the design becoming slightly heightened and, though I hesitate to use the word, theatrical. We treated 14 rooms in this fashion!

“In the small council chamber, for example, parts of *Dr Tulp’s Anatomy Lesson* by Rembrandt were used as floor-to-ceiling wall covering. The giant faces of these powerful men had a particular relevance to this room, helping the sense of people, listening, watching and plotting.

“Charles’s closet, which had wall paintings of giant birds, giant snails and mushrooms, reflects the idea that he was very interested in scientific matters. His private bedroom portrayed the heavens, celestial sky. In his state bedroom and the ante-room were the key tapestries which were very heraldic and had the lion and the unicorn, which are Charles’s emblems.

“One of the very positive aspects of working in Prague on a period drama was the availability of artisan talent, such as glassmakers, metalworkers, patina artists and scenic artists, who would have been financially prohibitive to work with in the UK. Had I known about the talent out there, I would have been a little calmer in contemplating the enormity of the project.”

Creating the Set: Key Facts

Building the interior of Whitehall Palace

- The set covered a 150’x80’ area
- All of the glass used was hand-blown in the Czech Republic (using a technique which dates back to the 17th century)
- 20 paintings were used
- 14 rooms in total were built
- It took 15 weeks to build the set
- 150 Czech workmen were involved
- Seven draughtsmen worked on both interiors and exteriors

Building the exterior at Toczniak Castle

- 16 weeks to build
- Approx six rooms were built
- 40 Czech workmen involved
- Five houses in traditional Tudor style were built for the London street scene (three were six storeys high)
- The Holbein Gate, which once stood in the entrance to Whitehall Square, was built from scratch
- The Houses of Parliament were built from scratch
- 14 key locations across the Czech Republic were used
- Prince Charles’s personal embroiderer created Charles II’s hand-embroidered coat of arms, which can be seen on his bed head.