



IATSE LOCAL 891

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, its Territories and Canada • British Columbia and the Yukon

Set Decoration - Reading List

'Backstage Handbook' 3rd Edition

- Paul Carter
- Broadway Press
- ISBN 0-911747-29-X

'A to Z Guide to Film Production Terms' 5th Edition

- Tim Moshansky
- First Wave Publishing
- ISBN 0968070205

'Woodworking for Dummies' 1st Edition

- Jeff Strong
- For Dummies Publishing
- ISBN-13: 978-0764539770

'The Encyclopedia of Window Fashions'

- Charles T. Randall
- Randall International
- ISBN 0-9624736-2-6

Online Resources:

'Glossary of Terms' - attached to this document.

www.worksafebc.com

- This is the WCB site. It contains the Occupational Health & Safety regulations in effect in this province as well as very good general safety information

www.actsafe.ca

- Aligned with BC's film industry, they provide training, courses, workshops and accident prevention

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Set Decoration - Glossary of Terms

“**A/C Cord**” – An electrical extension cord (cable) having three prongs so as to accommodate most plug and socket connectors for modern appliances. A/C Cord should not be confused with a **Zip Cord**, which can only accommodate two-prong plug and socket connectors.

“**Background**” (aka **atmosphere**) – 1) term used to describe Extras (Actors) that are used in the background of a scene to create a sense of realism. 2) Dressing that defines the set but is not featured in the foreground.

“**Blocking**” – Defines when the Director walks through a scene with the Actors and the on-set crew, determining the position(s) of the camera and actors during the upcoming scene. This allows the crew to best prepare and adjust for the upcoming shots.

“**Breakaway**” – Any on-camera item that is designed to break apart easily without causing harm to the actors. The items may be fabricated from a special material (breakaway glass, balsa wood, etc.) or designed to break easily (notched or scored items).

“**Breakdown**” – Or “Ageing” refers to the process of making an item appear to be used/worn according to the requirements of the story/setting.

“**Breakaway Glass**” – A range of specialty materials used in place of real glass when glass needs to be destroyed or shattered safely for the requirement of a scene.

“**Burned Location**” – Any location (house, restaurant, park etc.) that will not allow filming due to previous unresolved problems with film productions.

“**Buyer**” – A person responsible for researching, buying and renting set dressing. They also are responsible for completing rental agreements and other related paperwork (transport order, cheque requests, etc.) as required.

“**C-Stand**” – From “Century-stand”. This “work horse of the movie industry” is a telescopic stand with three staggered legs, two rising columns and a clip that can accommodate flags, nets or scrims used by the Grip Department to modify light quality.

“**Call Sheet**” – A schedule sheet distributed at the end of each shooting day outlining the next day’s shooting schedule and call time for cast and crew. It also includes location maps, other production requirements, and information for the following day of shooting. This document is prepared by the Second Assistant Director and distributed on set by the Trainee Assistant Director and the 3rd Assistant Director.

“**Call Time**” – When indicated on the call sheet, Call time indicates the time at which the cast and crew must show up for work on set. If you are not listed on the call sheet, and depending on your position and duties, your direct supervisor may provide you with a different call time.

“**Carps**” – A slang term for a Scenic Carpenter, those employed in building the sets.

“**Catwalk**” – Platform, or decks mounted up near the ceiling in many studios, allowing crew to access hard to reach areas, typically for rigging.

“Cheat” – The act of intentionally moving an object or actor in or out of the way (in coverage shots) in order to improve the look of the shot. May result in a shot that is not in exact continuity, but not noticeable in the final cut.

“Cleared” – Item(s) refers to brands, logos, images and copy-written objects that have been legally approved by production to be used in the film.

“Closed Set” – A set where only essential personnel are allowed to be present due to the sensitive nature of the shot (intense emotion, nudity, etc.).

“Chachkas” or **“Chachkes”** – A small ornamental piece of set dressing.

“Change Over” – When set dressing is removed from a set and replaced with new dressing in order to transform it into a different set. Usually, this is done when the shooting crew is finished with the set.

“Coke and Smoke” – When the director requests a private blocking or rehearsal with the actors, the crew is asked to go for a ‘coke and smoke,’ i.e. leave the set and take a break.

“Company Move” – When shooting on location, this term refers to the action of moving the entire crew and all of the trucks to a new location for the next scene.

“Condor” – Also known as an “Aerial Boom Platform Lift”. A large moveable crane-like device with a bucket on an extending arm used to elevate cameras, lights, set dressing and/or operators.

“Continuity” – The act of keeping narrative consistency and flow in the visual and dialogic aspects of a scripted story. If continuity is not correct, gaps or inconsistencies can greatly affect the quality of the edit, and may leave audiences confused.

“Coverage” – Getting “coverage” refers the range of secondary shots, from different angles that are filmed in order to tell the story and provide adequate material for the editing team to cut the scene together.

“Cover Set” – Also referred to as “Rain Cover” or “Weather Cover”, defines a scene set in a studio or location that has been prepped as a shooting alternative. This option is typically used in case of bad weather or logistical problems.

“Crimping” - Also known as “Swaging” is a process where a Crimping/Swaging tool (Nicopress) is used to compress crimps (Nicopress Sleeves) that have been threaded with a loop of aircraft cable to form a tight bond (for rigging). Crimps are either made up of aluminium or copper.

“Dance Floor” – a stage floor made of smooth, flawless sheets of plywood that are screwed onto a plywood subfloor in order to provide a smooth surface for dolly camera movements.

“Dash Card” – Refers to a card or sticker that identifies the production title, affixed to a crew members’ vehicle windshield. The dash card is used to identify crew members’ cars while filming on location or studio.

“Desert Dolly” – Sometimes called by its trade name, the Mojave Desert Dolly, the desert dolly is equipped with big balloon tires that can travel over sandy terrain and other loose earth. Primarily used in the Lighting, Grip and Set Dec departments.

“Ditty Bag” – Small bag used by film crews to store smaller tools and other useful items. Originally referred to small bags of necessities carried by sailors while at sea.



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“To Dress” – To define a set by arranging items such as furniture, drapes and art work (dressing) on a given set.

“Dulling Spray” – A removable cloudy translucent spray (either commercial spray or arid extra dry deodorant) used on shiny surfaces such as windows and mirrors to prevent unwanted reflections.

“Dunnage” – Pieces of wood, matting, inflated cells or similar material used to keep a cargo in position during transport.

“Eighty-Six” (86) – Industry shorthand term that means to remove or get rid of an item. E.G. “Well we’ll have to 86 the dumpster before the next set up.” This term comes from bylaw 86 in Los Angeles, which stipulates that the film crew have to be out of a residential neighbourhood by a certain time.

“Electronic Press Kit” (E.P.K.) – Refers to a press or publicity kit that is in the form of a video. The EPK may include “behind the scenes” segments on movie sets for television shows (like E.T.) or the “making of” programs.

“Eye-line” – Refers to the actor’s direct field of vision (his eye-line) when he/she is performing in a scene. It is essential to keep the eye-line of the actor clear (or, if not possible, avert your eyes) during a take to ensure the actor is not distracted and performs at his best.

“Felt Bumpers” – Small felt stickers used on the bottom of furniture and heavy or abrasive objects to prevent scratching of hardwood, linoleum or stone floors.

“Rubber bumpers” - Are small clear rubber stickers that are applied underneath smalls (vases, etc.) to prevent scratching furniture surfaces. They can also be used on the back bottom corners of picture frames to protect the wall.

“Furnie” - or “Furney Blanket”, “Packing Blanket” or “Sound Blanket”– Abbreviated term to describe furniture pads used by Set Decoration and Grips to protect furniture, actors, and camera equipment. The standard use of a Packing Blanket is dark side up (Visible).

“Fire in the hole” – A Phrase used as an alert when an explosion, fire, or gunfire is used on set. This phrase is called out to let the crew know a weapon is loaded, ready to go and a loud noise is soon to follow.

“Flashing” - Is a term On-Set Dressers use while employing a flash when taking a picture on set. This is done to notify the Electrics that the flash is from your camera, not one of their lights being blown out. It is also used to warn crew and cast, so that they are not surprised or blinded by the light.

“Flat” or **“Scenic Flat”** – A lightweight, moveable wooden structure that is used as a wall component or backdrop in set construction.

“Flying in” – Phrase used by crewmembers to let someone know that they, or a requested item is on their way to set imminently.

“Fold & Hold” - Refers to the instruction to box, label, inventory and store all dressing related to a set and hold it in a designated area in the lock up. This ensures the same set can be recreated integrally at a later date.

“Four-wheeled dolly”- (aka flat dolly). A low riding platform with four wheels used to move large loads too heavy to carry by hand.

“Force Majeure” – From the French ‘major force’. Describes an unexpected or uncontrollable situation that causes a show to shut down filming for a period of time. This could be an actor getting ill, an ‘act of God’ (freak weather occurrence) an accident or other similar reasons.

“Forced Call” – Indicates when a production manager needs to bring in a cast and crew outside of turnaround time (required rest hours between two shoot days). To compensate for this, the cast and crew being “forced” are being paid a premium rate for the entire day.

“Foreground” – Anything or set piece that is in the front of the camera’s field of vision and not blocked by anything else.

“French Hours” also called “Pacific Northwest Hours” – A shooting day that allows for a one hour sit down breakfast followed by nine hours of shooting without a break, at which point wrap is called. During French hours, food is served to the crew at various points during the day as they are working. This usually occurs to get a production back on schedule after an extremely long day, or for natural lighting reasons.

“French Reverse” – refers to shifting of dressing on a set that gives the illusion that the shot of a scene is filmed from a different angle. It can also be a reverse shot that cheats the angle of some unwanted background.

“Fuller’s Earth” – A clay-based powdered earth formerly used on movie set, costumes and special effects as a substitute for real dirt and dust. While it has recently been replaced with the safer product **Pyrolite** the term is still used to refer to tan coloured scenic dust.

“Fun-Tak” – A blue (or white) putty that is slightly tacky, and provides temporary adhesion when applying paper dressing onto walls. LePage is the more common brand used in the industry as it offers consistent product quality.

“Gak” – Slang film term used to describe non-descript dressing, equipment, props, etc. Loosely means ‘stuff’.

“Glue Blocks” – Small scrap pieces of 3/4” plywood glued to the backside of a flat. The block supplies added strength when hanging heavy objects to the flat. Plywood is used because it does not split easily.

“Gimbal” – 1) Platform or support that allows a set, vehicle or item to be positioned at different angles (known as ‘gimbaling’). 2) To angle or prop a reflective picture, mirror or hanging in order to deflect light or other reflections visible in the camera frame.

“Goo-Gone” (or **Goof Off**) – A proprietary cleaning product that removes residue (such as sticker glue or tape) from hard surfaces. Always wear gloves while using this toxic product and test first in an inconspicuous area of the item.



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“(to) **Greek**” – the act of covering or modifying a graphic that is in shot, but that the production either does not want to feature, or does not have the permission to show on screen. Materials used for *Greeking* include: vinyl, labels, stickers, felt markers, and coloured tape.

“**Green/Blue Screen**” – Coloured screens used in scenes where the background will be added in post-production. Also known as **chroma key** screen, as the green or blue (chroma) is ‘keyed’ to accept the added image in post.

“**Hand truck**” – (Aka as a ‘2 wheeler’ or ‘dolly’) a vertical L-shaped box-moving hand cart with a handle at one end, two wheels at the base, and a small platform on which to set objects for transport.

“**Hero Dressing**” – A piece of set dressing a main character interacts with. It is usually key to the story plot of the scene, and featured clearly on camera.

“**Honey wagon**” – A film unit trailer that contains washrooms, AD offices and dressing/resting rooms for the performers.

“**Hot**” – Describes the status of a gun or explosive effect that is loaded, and will be used in an upcoming scene. Also describes an electrical item with live current (lamp, clock, etc).

“**Hot Set**” – Indicates a set that is preserved in direct continuity from the last shot until the crew resumes shooting the scene. “Hot Set” signs are posted by the on-set dresser until the shooting crew returns.

“**Insert Shot**” – Typically a close-up shot of an object or action (such as a clock or a hand pushing a button), that is “inserted” into an edited segment in post-production.

“**INT.** (Interior)” or “**EXT.** (Exterior)” – A written descriptor that defines whether a scene takes place inside or outside a given set.

“**Jerry Rigging**” or “**MacGyvering**” - A term used to describe an unconventional way to rig, fix or hang dressing when the conventional way is not an option. I.E. using wedges on the outside brackets of venetian blinds to secure them when it is not possible to drill holes into the wall.

“**Juice**” – slang term for electricity or current.

“**Layering**” – Refers to the process of adding dressing to a set, starting with the largest items and working your way to the smallest. Layering the smalls is also known as ‘Detailing’.

“**Lock it up**” – Notice called right before the camera rolls, to cease any work activity or potential disruption that could interfere with the upcoming shot.

“**Lock-Up**” – (as in ‘set dec lock-up’) Refers to the Set Decoration Warehouse of a given production. The Lock-Up is used to store any Set Dressing or supplies not currently in use.

“**Main Unit**” – Refers to the main film crew (including trucks and equipment) that is responsible for principal photography. A main unit crew will shoot the majority of the scenes for any given production.

“Master Shot” – Typically a wide shot, sometimes called an *establishing shot*, that covers most of the main action of a scene.

“Mono” – Short for monofilament, more commonly called fishing line or fishing wire.

“On the Clock” – A term used to describe the time at which the crew is officially being paid for their services (eg; the beginning of the day or after lunch). ‘Off the clock’ is therefore when the crew is done with work .

“On the Day” – A term used to describe set work that is to be done on the same day as, or during, principal photography.

“On the Move” – A phrase used on set to notify the crew that production is relocating to a different set or location.

“Opening Set” – Refers to the process where the Decorator, Lead Dresser or a Set Dresser review a new, not yet established set with the Director, Director of Photography and other Department Keys, right before it is shot for the first time. This ensures that the set is satisfactory to all concerned and allows for adjustments before the first shot.

“Practical” – Any piece of set dressing that is operational on set, like a lamp, clock, fan, etc.

“Product Placement” – Refers to prominently featuring a brand product (such as a can of Coca-Cola) on a set. Brand products are only featured with permission from the company that owns them and the projects’ production.

“Prop” – Abbreviated term for Property. Any object that is handled by an actor in a film. Props are usually scripted and are the responsibility of the Props Department.

“Prop Houses” – Defines businesses that rent out props, set dressing and sometimes costumes, to the film industry. Prop houses in the Lower Mainland include: VPC (Vancouver Props & Costume), Acme, Super Props etc.

“Rental Agreement” – An itemized contract for set dressing rentals between the rental shop and the production company. It is essentially an inventory list for the dressers but also a contract for the production company.

“Reset” – Also called: ‘back to ones’, ‘first positions’, ‘going again’ or ‘number ones’. Called out by the first AD to bring actors, vehicles and extras back to their original positions for another take.

“Securing a load” – Ensuring that a load is safely tied down and fixed for safe transport. Ratchet straps, rope, furnie blankets and dunnage are some of the equipment used to perform this task.

“Scissor Lift” – A mobile electric or gas-powered platform mounted on folding arms. This lift is used to provide elevated work areas and help raise/ lower items or crew members.

“Sconce” – Or a “Wall Sconce Light” is a light fixture designed to be attached to a wall.

“Second Unit” – As opposed to the ‘main unit’, the second unit is a smaller shooting crew that is deployed to shoot secondary shots such as inserts, pick-ups, stunts or establishing shots that the main unit has not covered due to scheduling or poor takes.

“Splinter Unit” – Defines part of the main unit of a production that breaks away to do other set ups and shots in a different location.



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“Sugar Glass” – aka ‘candy glass’. Originally a sugar based glass that was used as a substitute for real glass when the glass needed to shatter safely and predictably on camera. Sugar glass is now made from synthetic compounds.

“Super Tape”- aka ‘Double Sided Tape’ or ‘snot’, it is a clear tape without backing support that provides a strong, removable (with caution) bond. Super tape comes in various widths and thickness and is not to be confused with carpet tape, which is composed of adhesive and backing support.

“Swamper” – A slang term that refers to a Set Dresser assigned as the departmental representative on the Set Dec truck. The swamper is also responsible for the loading and unloading of the set dressing.

“Swing Gang” – An American term used to describe a group of Set Dressers.

“Tail Gate” – Refers to the gate on the back of a truck. Not to be confused with the cargo door. On a cube truck, the gate is lowered to a horizontal position, and raised or lowered in order to ease loading and unloading of dressing.

“Tape Sandwich” – Refers to a piece of double sided or super tape placed in between two layers of green (low tack) painter’s tape. Tape sandwiches are used when affixing lightweight items to a wall, if both the wall and the item need special care in order to protect them, or when crew is prohibited from making holes in a wall. Often used for large paper posters and lightweight dressing that is too heavy for Fun-Tak.

“Tesa Tape” – Brand name. The thinnest and strongest double-sided tape. Tesa tape comes in a variety of widths.

“Top Dressing” – or “Detailing” – refers to adding smalls on top of furniture in a way that defines the character’s style, state of mind or characteristic. For example: a mountain of paperwork on the desk of an overworked police officer, a neatly organized desk of a high-powered executive, etc.

“3M Hooks” – Name brand. These hooks are plastic hangers that don’t use screws or brad nails but rather a strong tape-like, removable adhesive. They come in many sizes and weight bearing strengths.

“Turning Around” -aka ‘Reverse Angle’. Indicates when the camera turns around 180 degrees to shoot the portion of the set that is directly opposite the previous shot. Typically, turning around means that the dressing crew might first need to move dressing on set to accommodate the shifting of equipment, and complement or complete the dressing for the new shot.

“Wild”– A term used to describe a substantial object or structure that appears fixed, but can be removed to accommodate crew and/or equipment. Commonly used in the term “wild wall” which refers to a removable scenic wall segment on a built set.

“Wrap Pack” – A package consisting of Rental Agreements, Purchase Orders, Transportation Orders and photographs of set dressing put together by a Buyer, or Set Dec Coordinator. The wrap pack inventories all of the various Set Dec rentals and purchases, and guides the striking of the set, so that all items are 1) accounted for and 2) returned to the right suppliers or lock up.

“Wrapping” – The act of striking the dressing from a set and returning the dressing to the rental houses and purchases to the lock up.

“Zap Strap”- (aka ‘zip ties’) a plastic strip that can be threaded through its end and tightened as a fastener. A Zap Strap can also come slightly modified with small ring extension used for screws. In that case, it is called a ‘cable tie’.

“Zip Cord” – A slang term describing a household, two prong extension cord that can accommodate two or three appliances. It is also a type of electrical cable with two or more conductors held together by an insulating jacket.

“Zip Cut Blade” – Or ‘Zip Cutter’ is a very thin grinder blade that is used to cut metal.