

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees
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IATSE LOCAL 52

JOB DESCRIPTION – Prop Department

Job Title:	Set Decorator
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The Set Decorator is responsible for converting the blank canvas of the set into a space that feels authentic, lived-in, and believable. This artist deals in the details, the small touches that reveal to the audience something about the person or people who occupy the locations of films and television shows.

DUTIES

Working in collaboration with the production designer, the set decorator is responsible for furnishing interior and exterior sets for film and television. All of the large or small items that fill a room or outdoor area but are not handled by the cast (props) are selected by the set decorator to enhance the visual realism of the scene; these objects include furniture, drapery, knickknacks on a shelf, and even trash cans or street cones outdoors. The process begins with pre-production meetings with the director, production designer, director of photography, and other design department heads; there the creative team discusses the visual style of the production, including lighting, costumes, and other design elements, which are pivotal to establishing the overall aesthetic as envisioned by the director. With this information in mind, the set decorator works closely with the line producer to prepare a department budget that outlines estimated expenditures for purchase or rental of set dressings and necessary labor; it will be the task of the set decorator to monitor this budget on a daily basis and keep records of receipts.

In planning the set dressing design scheme, the decorator researches the time period, genre, and setting of the story and prepares a script breakdown that will detail each object required to dress the scene; before shooting begins, this person will present drawings, inspirational material, and color swatches to the director and production designer for approval. When given the green light to proceed, he or she will then work with the set buyer to track down and acquire items, then carefully catalog each object by scene and shooting date. When specialty items are not available for rental or purchase, the set decorator will design and order the fabrication of specialty pieces; he or she will routinely work with sculptors, illustrators, graphic designers, and other artists to create original items. During principal photography, the decorator is on set to supervise the work of the on-set dressers and swing gang, and is available to the director to make alterations for the design as needed.

SKILLS AND EDUCATION

An education in theatrical design is beneficial even to artists working in television and film, as it teaches you the fundamentals of stagecraft, prop making, story analysis, and the techniques of bringing an artificial environment to life. A college degree in film and television production is also helpful. Courses in art history and interior design are invaluable to a set decorator, but you should also consider studying world history, engineering, landscaping, visual merchandising, psychology, and urban planning, as elements all of these come into play when visualizing the details of a character's life.