

## 'Jack of all trades': Pullman native takes home award for set design

By Omie Drawhorn, Daily News staff writer

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### Photos:



Alec Hammond never dreamed he would win awards for re-creating the inside of a jumbo jet for the big screen.

The 1988 Pullman High School graduate went to school at Amherst University to pursue a career as a doctor, but he was forced to look elsewhere when the biology class he needed was full.

"I took an art class and never went back," he said.

These days, Hammond works as production designer on movie sets. His most recent work came during Ricky Gervais' directing debut, "This Side of the Truth," and the television pilot "Lie to Me."

He designed the stage set for "To Kill a Mockingbird" for the Intiman Theater in Seattle last fall.

His efforts have paid off. He recently was named one of two 2008 winners of the Princess Grace Award. It was the second time he's received the honor.

The awards for theater, dance/choreography and film continue the legacy of Grace Kelly, Princess of Monaco, who anonymously helped emerging artists pursue their goals throughout her lifetime.

Award-winners who distinguish themselves in their artistic disciplines after receiving their initial Princess Grace Awards are eligible to win the coveted Princess Grace Statue. Hammond was one of those people, and his recent award netted him \$25,000 and a special bronze statue of Princess Grace.

"It's been truly fantastic both times," Hammond said. "I'm thrilled; I never think about being successful or not, I think about doing good work."

Hammond's art classes and experience working on theater sets, helped set the stage for his future.

In college, he worked as an electrician and did designing and lighting during the summers.

He never considered a career as a film designer until he graduated from Yale Drama School. His wife wanted to move to Los Angeles to be a director, and everything slowly fell into place.

"Being a designer is being a jack of all trades," he said. "You're an architect, painter, interior decorator, you read scripts and analyze."

He said it helps that he has an acting and directing background.

"There's a middle world between reading a script and figuring out what it's all about," he said. "There's a visual strategy."

Hammond's first film work was as an art director for "Tinseltown." His first movie of note was "Austin Powers 2: The Spy Who Shagged Me."

He's since worked on "The Contender," "KPAX" "Men in Black II" and "Donnie Darko."

Hammond said one of his biggest challenges was designing the interior of the jumbo jet for "Flight Plan" with Jodie Foster.

He said the set was a design challenge, and it was horrible to shoot on. He had to think about access for camera crews and getting 250 extras on and off the plane.

"You had to really think about the whole machinery of film, how to approach it artistically and practically," he said.

Hammond usually begins his work with a sketch pad and goes from there.

He works closely with some actors, depending on how interested they are in the small details of their character's lives.

"I love watching the actors," he said. "You had to drag me off the set of 'The Contender.' Joan Allen and Jeff Bridges were amazing."

He said the production design field is competitive, and he always has something new to learn with the variety of films he has worked on.

"I have a short attention span, and the material I'm dealing with is drastically different from project to project, from quantum mechanics to animated cats to corrupt cops in L.A." he said.

"It's an odd group of skills to have," he added. "There's not any one way to do it. About half the film designers are architects trained as theater designers and the remainder are fine art painters. There are a lot of different ways to get into the profession."

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