

Redford home 'a sanctuary' for collector



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Costume designer and collector Lauren Miloy calls her home a sanctuary. She stores 350 period costumes there, most of which are meant to be seen and not worn.

By Mary Rodriguez
Special writer

Even Jean Collins' bold "Dynasty" wardrobe would look drab in comparison to Lauren Miloy's clothes.

Miloy, a professional costume designer and collector, has 350 period originals stored in her south Redford Township home — everything from Civil War-era black embroidered silk to a seal-skin cape. Although most of the goods are meant to be seen and not worn, stored in boxes and trunks in her climate-controlled attic and basement, she does cherish a few personal treasures.

Miloy's winter coat is a mid-length fur circa 1943 which she models with a Bette Davis wide brim black hat. Other treasures include 100-year-old Japanese silk and a 1910s cream color floor-length dress with a hoop skirt and tulle.

"Most of these things will end up in a museum someday," said Miloy, who has no living relatives. Trying to get her to pin down her favorite fashion era is nearly impossible.

"I love the '20s, the '30s, the Victorian era and Egyptian. Oh, I love them all."

At 16, Miloy has been costume designer on the Canadian and other entertainers for over two decades. She did her first show, "Pirates of Penzance," at the age of 15. But glory came even earlier for the natural born seamstress.

"It was my first sewing contest when I was 5," she said, recalling the blue ribbon she won at the Michigan State Fair for a matching tea towel and apron set.

SHE HAS since mastered such advanced tasks as making hats, placing tiny geometric metal designs into mesh fabric by hand and outfitting every theatrical character from Linnie Borden to the Elephant Man.

For the past five years the University of Windsor drama department has been the showcase for her work. As instructor and costume designer on the Canadian campus, she has just completed her 69th main stage production there, "Tim Not a Legend, Vince Lombardi."

"The only period costume necessary for this production was for Lombardi's grandfather, who arrived at Ellis Island in 1890," she said. "The Canadian authors of this play are Lombardi collectors, and we're lucky enough to have Lombardi's coaching jackets, sweaters, Bart Starr's uniform and Joe Thiesmann's Washington Redskins uniform."

Most productions don't come so completely outfitted and marathon sewing sessions have occurred

on more than one occasion to meet a deadline, she said.

"This is the hardest work I've ever done in my life. I usually put in a 12- to 16-hour day and keep three changes of clothes at work: one for teaching, one for administrative meetings and luncheons and one for grub work."

A self-confessed workaholic, she admits she loves the pace.

"The students are the greatest part, watching their potential develop."

Some of her star pupils have worked at the Stratford and Shaw theater festivals, Ontario's internationally acclaimed summer festivals.

"The entire faculty all have an area of specialization. I just soak up what they have to offer. I suppose when the time comes that I won't be learning from them or with them, it will be time to leave."

AN AMERICAN, Miloy was offered the job in Windsor after impressing the drama department director during a guest artist stint there.

Miloy's students seem equally impressed.

"Lauren is one of our most respected professors and has a way of encouraging and bringing out the best in people," said third-year student Wendy Krekeler.

"Last year she worked 88 straight days to complete a difficult season, yet she still had time for any personal problems and teaching classes."

The job and the daily 50-mile-round-trip international drive leave Miloy with little free time.

She calls her home, bedecked with Victorian-style furnishings, "a sanctuary." She shares it with an 11-year-old blind Boston bull terrier, Ming.

A foot-pump sewing machine in an ornate cabinet in the living room is Miloy's favorite piece of furniture.

"My great-grandmother made her living off of this machine," she said. "I use it only for guest lectures. Eventually it will be donated to the Henry Ford Museum."

Another grandmother was also a professional seamstress.

"I guess it was in my genes," Miloy has five other sewing machines in her house, including a 19th century, cast-iron Singer that had to be converted to electric.

"Not even my first-year students can run this machine," she said.

A PERPETUAL student herself, Miloy has acquired everything from a bachelor's degree at Eastern Michigan University to a doctoral degree in costume design from the University of Michigan. She attended Wayne State University and the Rhode Island School of Design along the way.

Eight years ago she launched her own company, Designing Yours. Clients included Motown's Four Tops and Earthquake as well as the Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio.

"I made 1,500 costumes in three months for four years for all of Cedar Point's live entertainment."

Although her university job has put her company on temporary hold, Miloy still takes occasional clients and isn't adverse to helping local theater groups, such as the Dearborn Civic Theatre and the Grosse Pointe Players.

Pressed for a number she can only say that she has made thousands of costumes during her career.

"I don't even like to think about it," she said. Although her students help her sew for the university productions, she is responsible for the actual design and has a penchant for authenticity.

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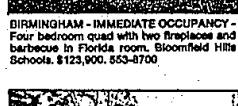
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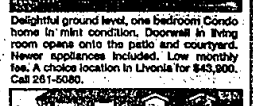
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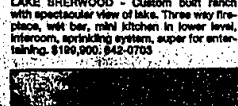
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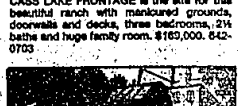
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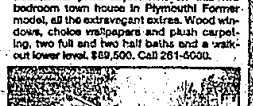
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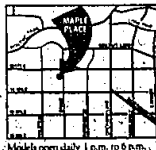
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