



As I delved deeper into the task of taking on **“Wicked”** a realization dawned, gentle yet profound: designing this film wasn't simply a fresh endeavor, it was a reimagining, a reorchestration of the very fabric of "The Wizard of Oz." It was a challenge that promised to be on par, if not greater, than any project I'd ever undertaken. This wasn't just one film, but two, intricately woven narratives traversing the epic journey of Elphaba and Galinda, from reluctant rivals to kindred spirits, forever marked by their profound influence on each other.

But where to begin? The whimsical land of Oz, a canvas both familiar and unknown, awaited. Munchkinland, with its boundless cheer, beckoned, its vibrant hues and playful details demanding careful consideration. Shiz, shrouded in a veil of mystery, whispered of forgotten grandeur and hidden secrets, necessitating a delicate balance between the fantastical and the ominous. Kiamoko, a forgotten former seat of a great family, pulsing with an old energy that needed to be captured in its architecture and landscapes.

And lastly, the Emerald City – the ultimate design conundrum. How could one surpass the iconic image of the green-hued metropolis, a mere painted backdrop in the original 1938 film? This is where the real challenge would unfold. The Emerald City, in this new iteration, demanded not just visual splendor, but a depth of detail that encapsulated the essence of Oz's heart, its soul, and the intricate tale woven within its emerald embrace.





BACKLOT BUILD WITH EMBANKMENTS

MUNCHKINLAND

Following a series of productive discussions, we reached a unanimous decision to cultivate the 9 million tulips in Norfolk. This eastern English county's expansive flatlands provided the ideal setting, characterized by seemingly endless landscapes and vast, open skies. My vision involved convincing production to allow the construction of the Munchkin village within the tulip fields, facilitating a smooth transition between the cultivated fields and the small marketplace village where many of the musical numbers would unfold. However, it became apparent that the crew necessitated a set in closer proximity to the studio, necessitating a backlot construction. The challenge subsequently arose: how to achieve a seamless transition between the fields and the village. We devised a solution: by sinking the village into the ground, it could practically materialize from the fields, creating an almost illusory effect. This approach necessitated employing VFX to integrate the backlot set seamlessly within our tulip fields. Additionally, we would need to construct embankments of tulips within the backlot set to create the illusion that the village resided at field level.



NINE MILLION TULIPS PLANTED IN NORFOLK



ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THE SETS WOULD JOIN TOGETHER



BACKLOT BUILD WITH EMBANKMENTS

PLANTING NINE MILLION TULIPS FOR THE MUNCHKIN SCENES

My approach prioritizes practical in-camera effects whenever possible. This allows us to seamlessly integrate CGI with real sets, locations, and landscapes. Real lighting and textures on physical elements provide a foundation for CGI, creating a believable and immersive experience.

Mark Eves a wonderful generous Norfolk flower farmer along with the help of our location Manager Adam Richards agreed to help source and plant 9 million tulips in lines of different colors. We could then achieve the wide shots of the Munchkin landscape in-camera. The fully built backlot set and its flowered embankments would allow VFX to drop the set seamlessly into the tulip landscape.

This ambitious approach prioritizes practical effects with strategic planning and collaboration to achieve a breathtaking and cost-effective solution for the endless tulip field scene.



Munchkin Country is a vibrant tapestry woven from sunshine and tulips! Rolling hills erupt in a riot of color, with farmers cultivating these cheerful flowers not just for beauty, but for their unique ability to yield a spectrum of natural dyes. Imagine inky violets, fiery oranges, and sunshine yellows alongside the classic reds and yellows. These aren't your average farmers; they're artist-chemists, coaxing the rainbow from their blooms. Passionate traders travel from afar, their caravans overflowing with silks the color of a summer sky or rich velvets the shade of a deep burgundy tulip. The central village is a living kaleidoscope, houses painted in riotous hues and doors adorned with intricate tulip carvings. The market square overflows with bolts of dyed cloth, skeins of yarn, and perhaps even tulip-infused treats! It's a celebration of color, a whimsical land where every shade tells a story, thanks to the artistry of the Munchkin people and their magical tulips.





BUILDING THE MUNCHKIN BACKLOT





Kiamo Ko: A Defiant Silhouette Against the Endless Sands

Concept: Kiamo Ko isn't just a castle; it's a defiant emblem of a bygone era, a testament to the forgotten magic that once pulsed through Oz. Its architecture, though ancient, utilizes lost principles of levitation, defying gravity yet remaining grounded in a sense of order and purpose.

Antigravity Architecture: The key to Kiamo Ko's defiance lies not in defying gravity entirely, but in manipulating it subtly. Imagine a series of inverted arches, their points reaching skyward. These arches wouldn't be perfect mirrors of one another; instead, they'd possess a slight asymmetry, a calculated tilt that interacts with the forgotten magic of the land, generating a gentle, constant lift. This subtle slant would also provide a visual cue, hinting at the castle's orientation even from a distance.

By incorporating these design elements, Kiamo Ko transcends the trope of a generic floating castle. It becomes a character itself, a silent testament to a forgotten age and a beacon of hope for Elphaba and Fiyero's new beginning.



The deceptive nature of the Wicked Witch of the West in Wicked necessitates a layered and impactful interior design for Kiamo Ko, her castle. The space should initially present as imposing and pristine, mirroring Dorothy's initial perception of the Witch. However, as the narrative unfolds, the true nature of Kiamo Ko – a relic of a bygone era where all creatures co-existed – should be revealed through the strategic use of stone and brickwork and secret passageways.

Shiz University

Shiz University, nestled within the esteemed City of Gillikin in the fantastical Land of Oz, stands as a beacon of academic prestige. Renowned for its rigorous curriculum in advanced magic and cutting-edge sciences, Shiz boasts a rich history and unwavering reputation for excellence. It is a cherished institution deeply woven into the fabric of Ozian society.



A Tapestry of Time and Tradition

The narrative unfolds with the arrival of two young witches-in-training, Elphaba and Galinda, who forge an unlikely yet enduring friendship within these hallowed halls. The architects envisioned Shiz as a place that resonated with a sense of antiquity – familiar yet distinct from conventional expectations. Their vision materialized as a complex architectural tapestry, meticulously blending influences from diverse cultures and artistic movements. This deliberate fusion aimed to capture the essence of a bygone era where cultural boundaries dissolved and the land pulsed with a unified, potent magic, predating the Wizard's arrival. Evoking a sense of nostalgia was paramount in establishing the architectural style's authenticity.



The Journey to Shiz: Embracing the Uniqueness of Oz

One of the initial considerations revolved around transportation to Shiz. Given the fantastical nature of Oz, conventional modes like cars or horse-drawn carriages were deemed out of place. Rivers emerged as a potential solution, offering a uniquely Ozian method of transportation. However, incorporating a large-scale water system within Shiz itself presented challenges. Therefore, meticulously identifying potential river locations for a seamless transition became a crucial aspect of the planning process.



A Cohesive Vision: From Backlot to Soundstage

It became evident that Shiz University would necessitate a substantial backlot construction to accurately depict its grandeur within the fantastical narrative. To achieve this, the initial focus shifted towards building the arrival dock, water tank, and entrance courtyard. These exterior elements seamlessly transitioned into meticulously crafted interior sets constructed on soundstages, ensuring a cohesive visual experience for the audience.

In essence, Shiz University transcends the realm of a mere educational institution. It embodies the rich tapestry of Oz's history, fostering innovation and magic while serving as a testament to the land's enduring spirit.



The Construction of Shiz: A Collaborative Challenge

The creation of Shiz presented a multifaceted challenge, demanding a composite back lot to accommodate diverse elements. A crucial aspect was the seamless integration of a water entrance, complete with functional boat docks, for specific scenes. Additionally, the intricate geography of interconnected interiors necessitated meticulous planning to ensure a clear understanding of transitions to soundstage sets. Furthermore, a direct connection between the main courtyard and landing docks was paramount.

The design intricacies mandated a highly detailed and involved construction process. Every surface presented a complex puzzle to solve. Working on such a grand scale inherently introduces constant pressure from time constraints, budgetary limitations, weather fluctuations, and tight schedules. The slightest misstep could have resulted in significant setbacks. Fortunately, our exceptional Art and Construction teams exhibited remarkable skill and dedication in overcoming these obstacles.

This project stands as a testament to their expertise and collaborative spirit. It is highly likely that I will never again encounter a set of this immense complexity in my career.





Shiz University

The decision to incorporate the inner courtyard adjacent to the entrance water tank presented a significant architectural challenge. Constructing an addition at this location increased the potential for exceeding height restrictions and encountering other complications associated with working at such an elevation (55 feet). It also left us vulnerable to weather. However, we recognized the immense value this transition would bring, offering breathtaking views across the entrance water tank towards the iconic giant arch.



Shiz University : Inner Courtyard



American Architectural Inspiration

From the outset, the project aimed to incorporate elements of American architecture to pay homage to the American fairytale, "The Wizard of Oz". We achieved this by drawing inspiration from the monumental arch designs from the "White City of Chicago" The Great Columbian Exposition of 1893. Seamlessly integrating it with the white rock sourced from the filming locations in southern England. This fusion of design elements effectively bridges the geographical and cultural references within the project.



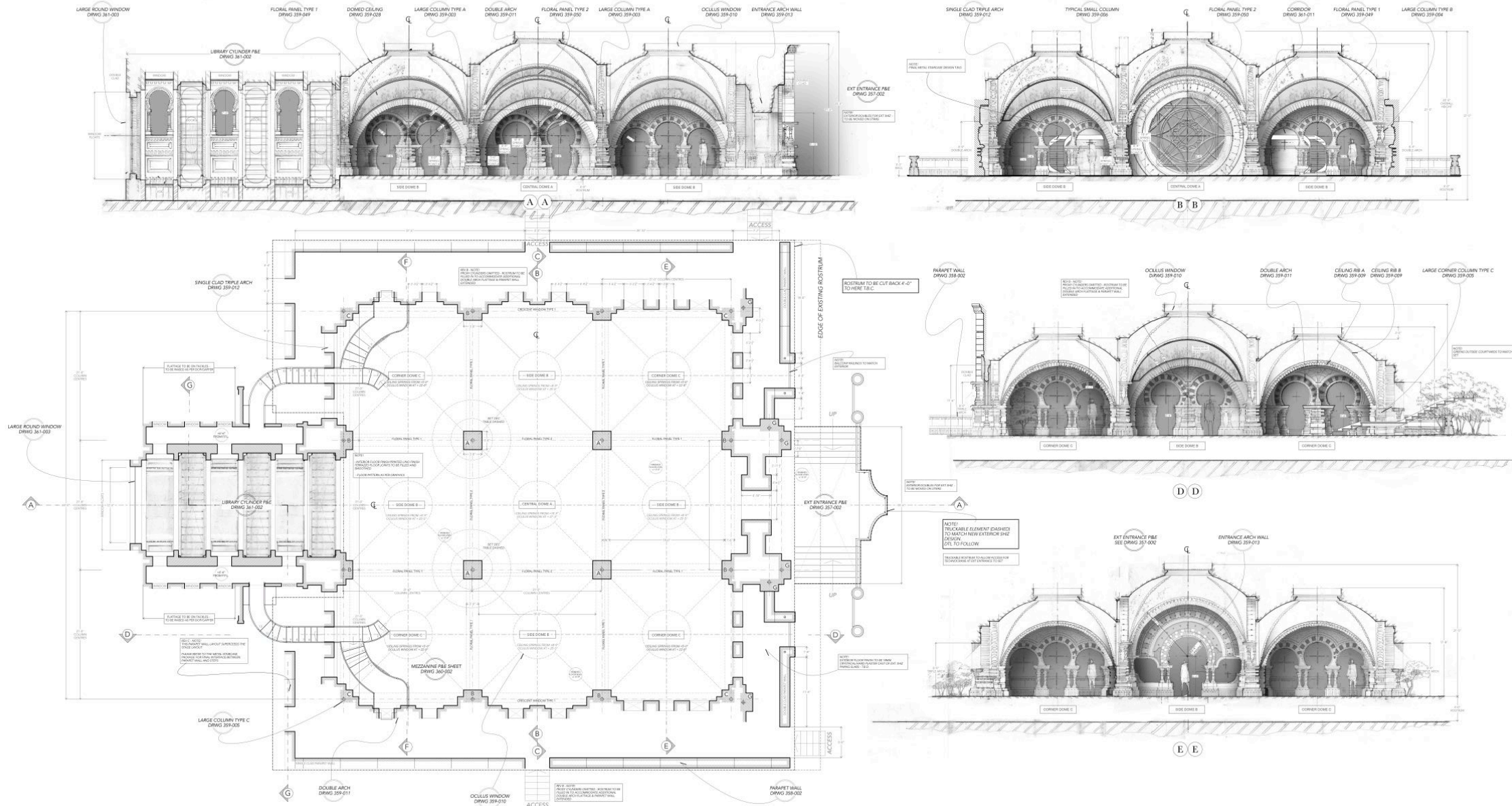
Building Shiz: A Collaborative Effort

The construction of Building Shiz, encompassing the water entrance and inner courtyard, presented a significant logistical hurdle for our Construction team. Compounding this challenge were unforeseen weather complications and delays inherent in groundwork preparation during pre-production. Fortunately, our resourceful location team leveraged their extensive experience to expedite the ground works of the three adjoining backlots: Munchkinland Village, Shiz University, and the Emerald City. Additionally, the creation of the "Emerald City Express" Train and station, requiring the strategic planting of wheat to evoke the vast plains of the American fairytale, The Wizard of Oz. Between Construction, Locations, the Greens Department and Set Dressing This project undoubtedly stands as the largest film set I have had the privilege to be involved with.

Construction Sequencing for the Shiz University Water Tank

To optimize efficiency, construction of the Shiz University water tank commenced first. The plan involved erecting the tank followed by the surrounding flatage, creating a structurally sound base before the SFX team filled it with water over several weeks. Time constraints necessitated a streamlined approach. Additionally, the intended height of the structure posed a potential obstacle, requiring strategic compromises throughout the construction process. My established methodology emphasizes the construction of sufficient set elements to enable the VFX team to comprehend the architectural themes and how lighting interacts with various surfaces.



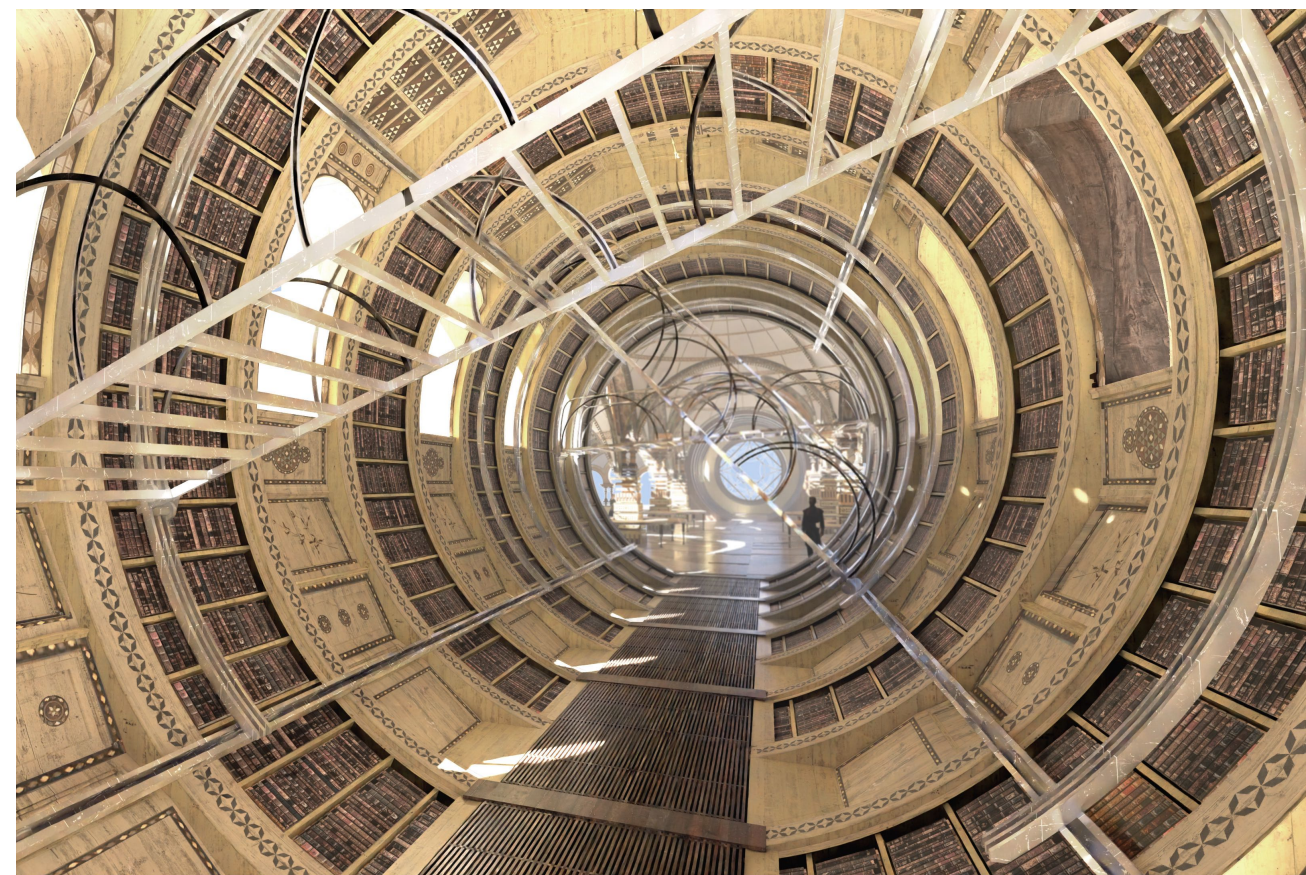
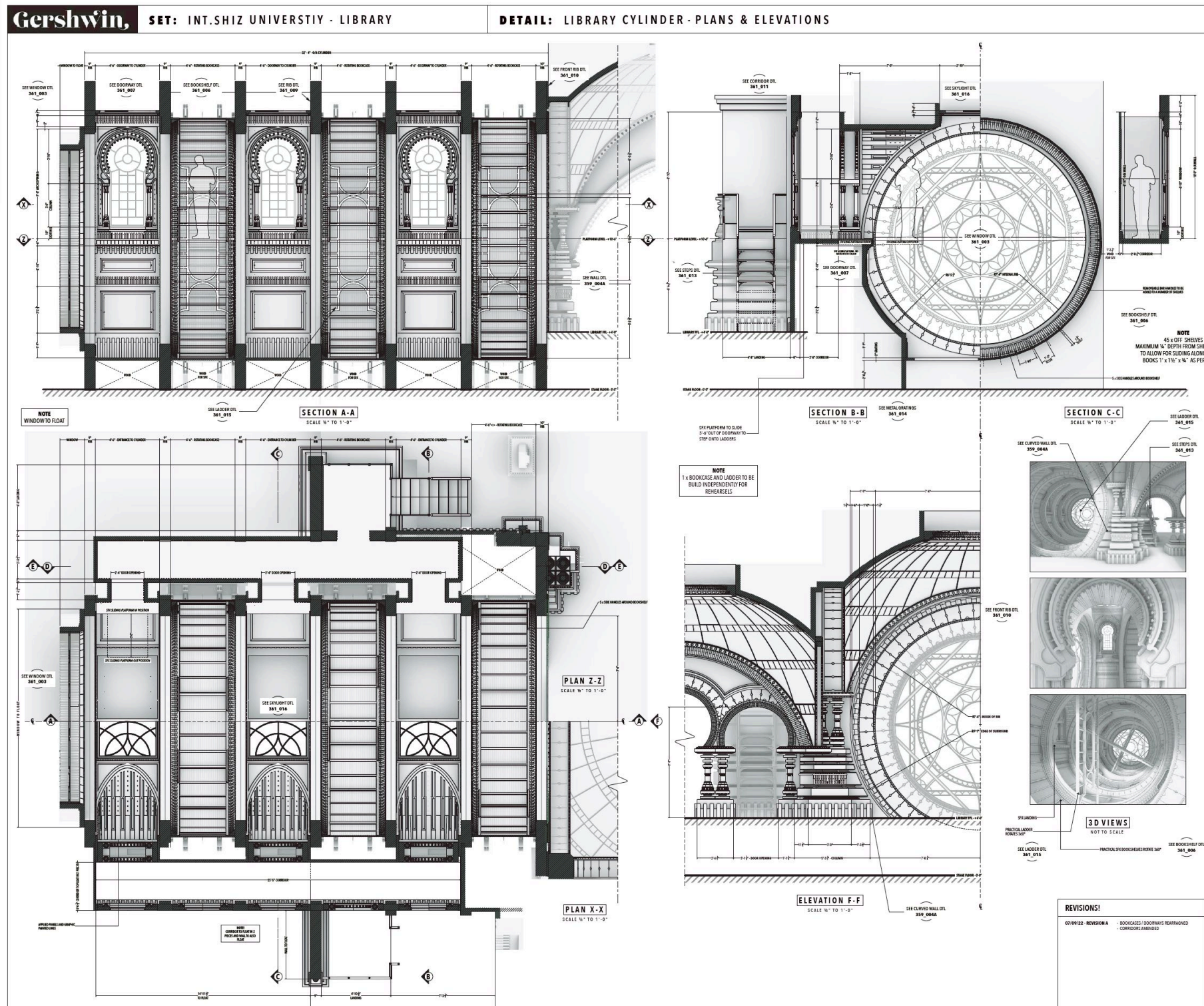


The Shiz Library: A Dynamic Set Design

The Shiz Library served as a pivotal set for introducing the character of Fyero and launching the elaborate dance number, "Dancing Through Life." Inspired by the captivating use of motion in film sets, particularly the works of Fred Astaire in "Royal Wedding," I envisioned an innovative approach that captured the essence of Oz. To achieve this, we conceived a design featuring giant, rotating circular bookshelves.

We hypothesized that choreographing a dance sequence utilizing three independently rotating wheels would visually reinforce the film's theme of defying gravity. The concept involved entering the library from the water entrance on the backlot, necessitating the replication of the exterior facade on stage to ensure seamless scene transitions. The central space would be framed by nine arches, flanked on three sides by these colossal rotating bookcases. Only one section would house operational wheels specifically designed for the dancers.





Shiz University Library

The SFX team meticulously engineered each segment to spin seamlessly, incorporating fixed architectural sections between each wheel to provide secure footing for the performers.

Adding another layer of complexity, the ladders were designed to rotate independently of the wheels, offering additional opportunities for dynamic movement and formation of the symbolic "OZ" at designated moments. Through extensive collaboration between the design team, SFX specialists, and dancers, along with weeks of rigorous testing and rehearsals, this innovative concept culminated in a truly remarkable dance sequence.

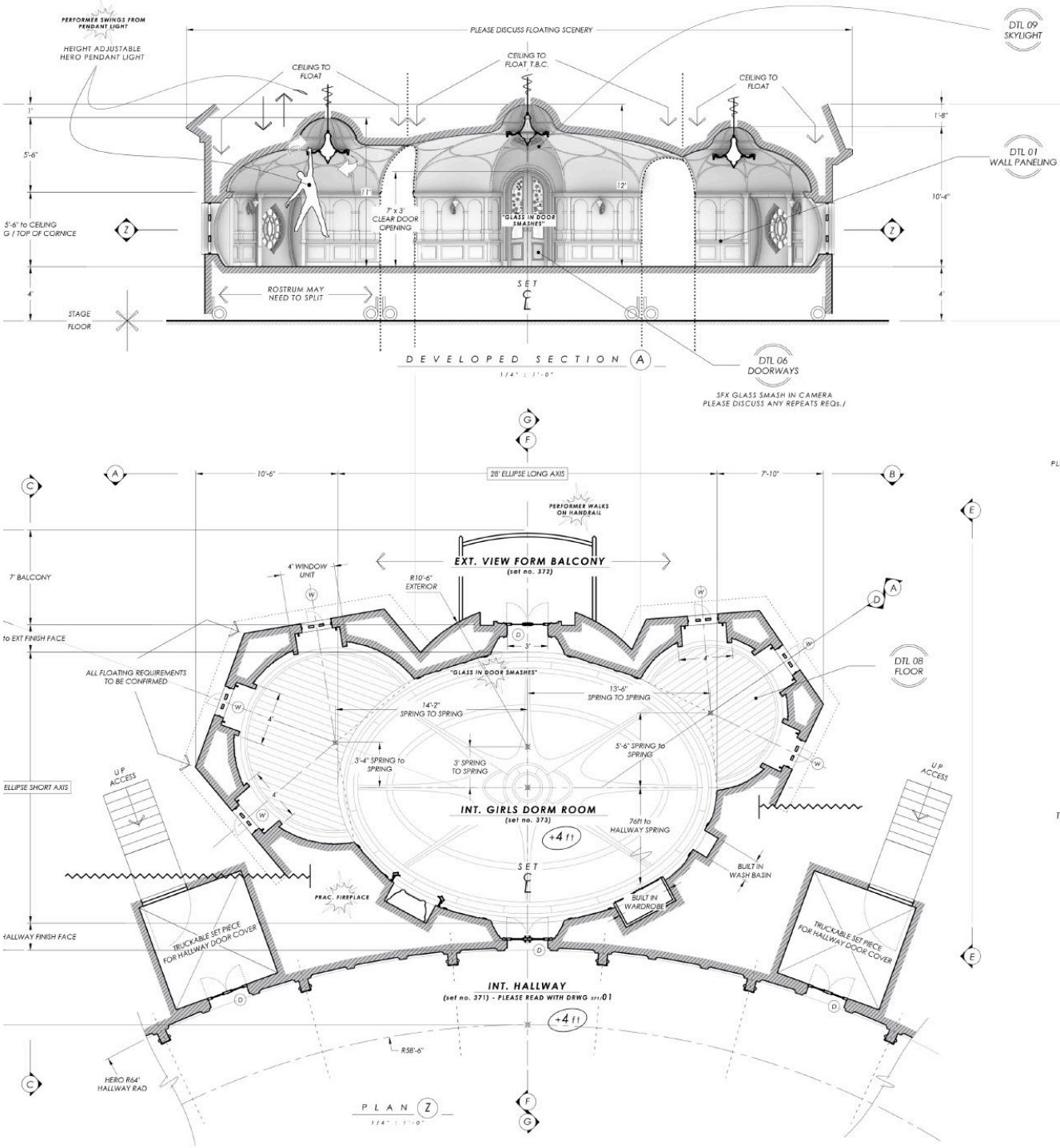
Shiz University.

Dorm rooms + Hallway

Creating a Dynamic Dorm Room Set

Designing the dorm room set demanded a multifaceted approach. We were tasked with filming two dance sequences and multiple scenes within this confined space. The challenge was to make the room feel believable as a dorm room while offering enough flexibility to accommodate these diverse film elements.

To achieve this, we explored using a combination of circles, ovals, and intersecting round spaces. This approach would not only provide visual interest throughout the different scenes but also extend to the ceiling, keeping the audience engaged with the unique environment. The set design further incorporated the needs of the dressing, props, and SFX teams. Numerous mechanical gags were seamlessly integrated within the set pieces, specifically designed to work within the context of the song numbers.



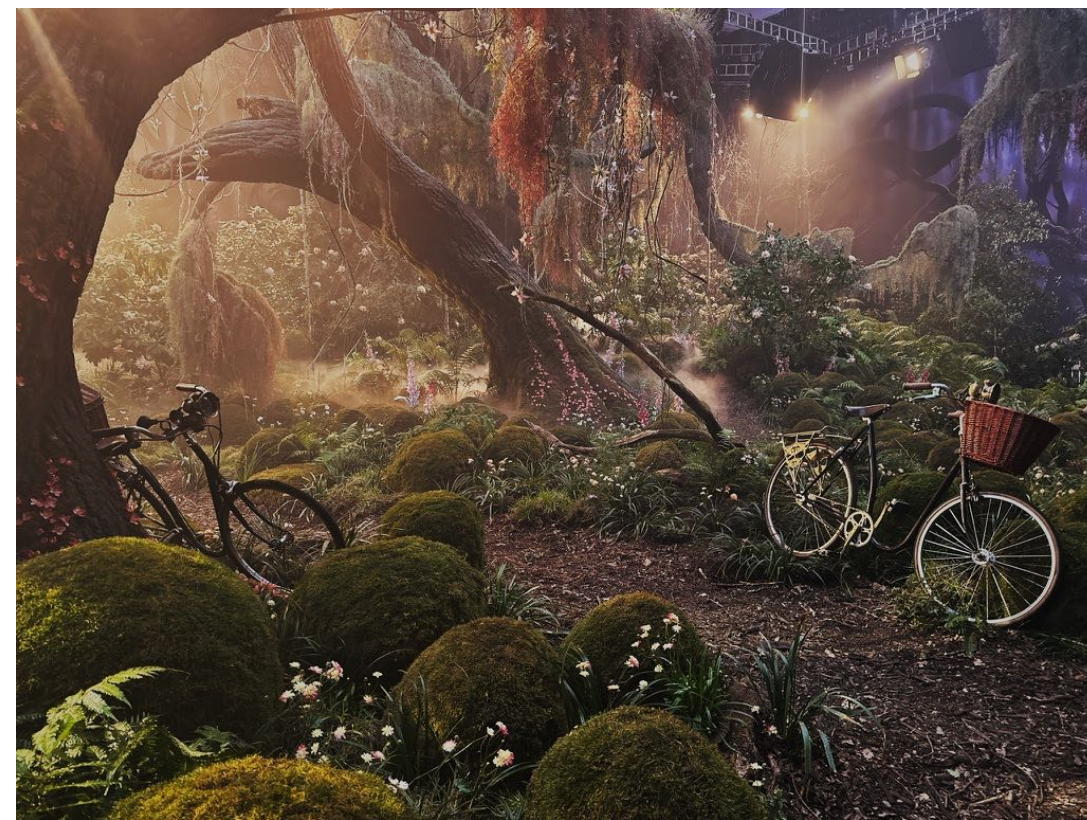
OZ .FORESTS

Crafting the Enchanting Ozian Woodlands:

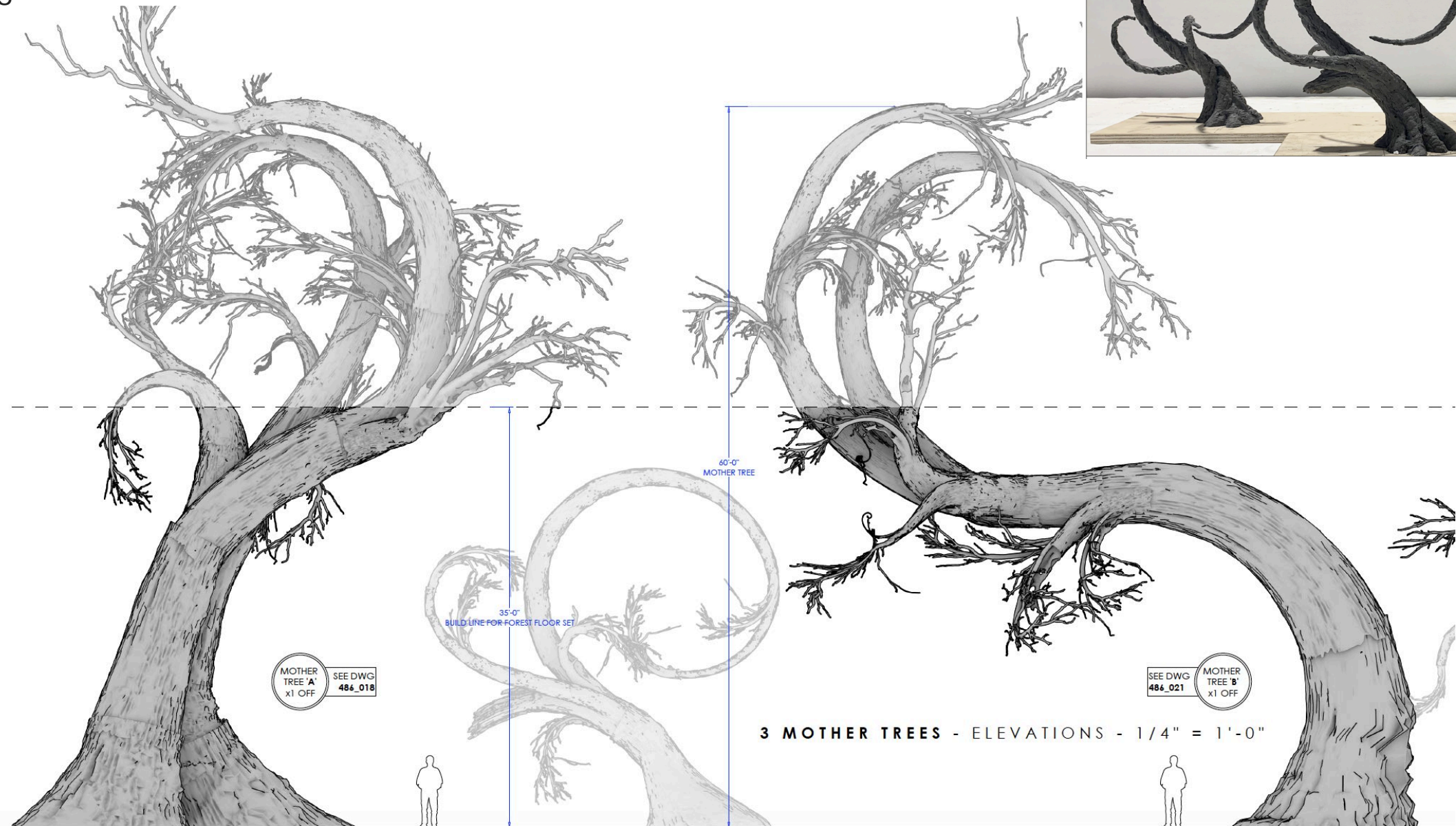
For the upcoming film adaptation, creating a truly magical on-screen experience for the iconic Land of Oz was paramount. While initial pre-production efforts focused on scouting real forests, the need for a fantastical aesthetic, particularly for the enchanting "I am not that girl" song sequence, necessitated a different approach.

A Soundstage Forest Takes Root

The solution? Constructing a bespoke forest environment on a soundstage. This strategic decision offered several advantages. Firstly, it allowed for complete creative control. We could design and build unique "Ozian" trees, departing from the traditional and embracing a circular form. This design choice would also foreshadow the placement of Elphaba's hidden lair in the second film, nestled high within the canopy of a giant "mother tree."



MAQUETTE PHOTOS



A Symbiosis of Design and Construction

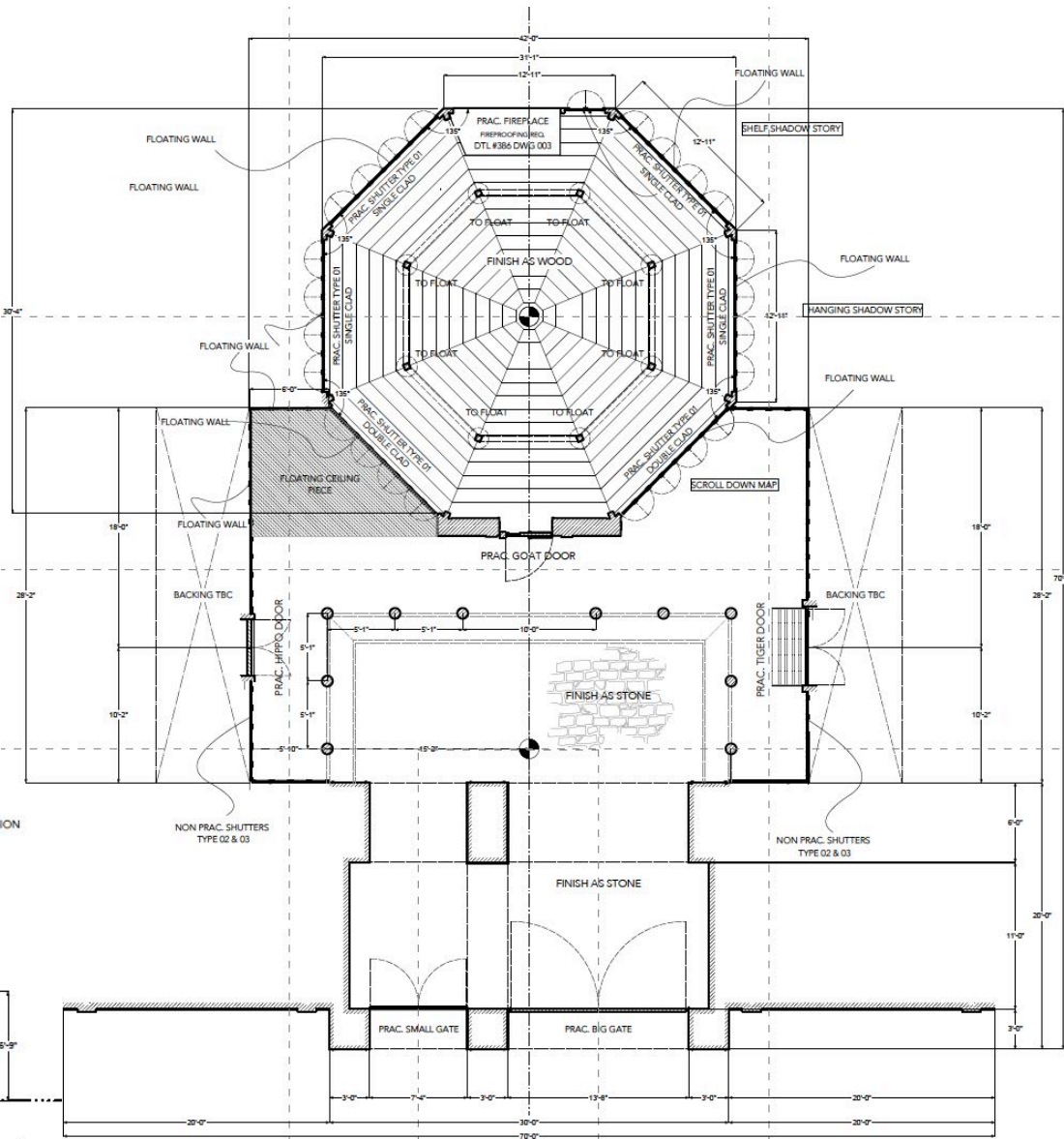
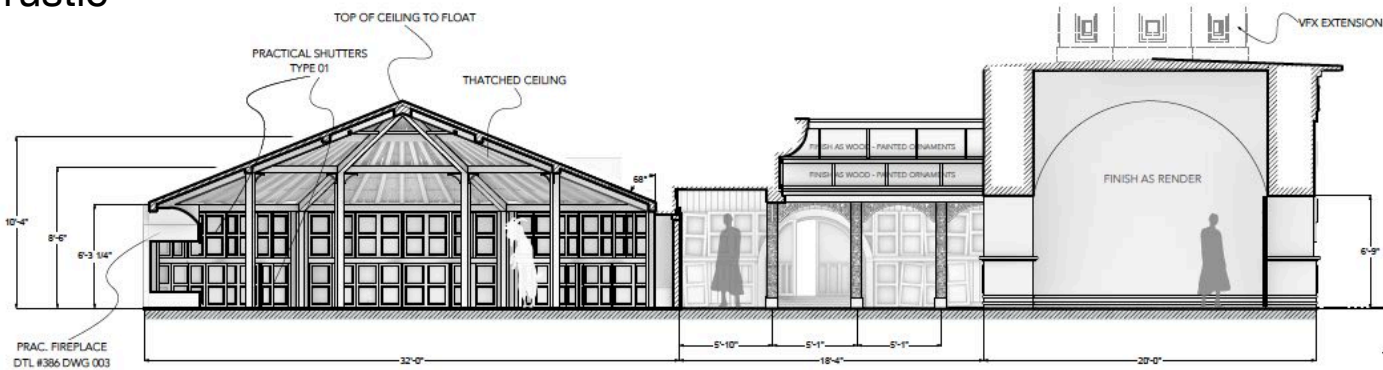
Soundstage filming offered a practical benefit during winter production. Building the forest indoors enabled us to work on numerous sets concurrently before transitioning to outdoor filming on the backlots in spring.

The greens department meticulously handpicked a vibrant array of plants and foliage, ensuring they thrived under the controlled lighting conditions of the soundstage. This meticulous selection process was complemented by the construction team, who began meticulously crafting the awe-inspiring, circular trees that would define the Ozian landscape.



Dr. Dillamond's Quarters.

Hidden on the outskirts of SHIZ lies a complex known as the **Animal Quarters**. Each enclosure is meticulously designed to suit the specific needs and functionality of its furry, feathered, or scaled inhabitant. Dr. Dillamond's quarters are particularly intriguing. While the interior boasts a comfortable and functional living space, built entirely on a stage, the exterior archways stand in stark contrast. These weathered structures were built in the ancient forests of Windsor Park, adding a touch of rustic charm to Dr. Dillamond's unique abode.



The Emerald City Express:

A Clockwork Marvel for the Land of Oz



The Emerald City Express: Not Quite a Train

Our story hinges on getting the characters from Shiz to the Emerald City quickly – "One Short Day" needs to begin with their departure. Water travel felt too slow, and didn't capture the modern spirit we envisioned for our Wizard. He'd surely have brought some advanced technology from his world, but replicating the hot air balloon wouldn't do either. A train seemed ideal, but not one powered by the familiar steam engines of our Industrial Revolution. That wouldn't mesh with the fantastical, colorful essence of Oz.

I've always been captivated by the intricate, beautiful mechanical figures – automatons – built during the reign of Louis XV. The famed illusionist and watchmaker Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin's mechanical orange tree further fueled my fascination. What if the Emerald City Express ran on clockwork, a marvel of complex, synchronized mechanisms? The challenge became designing a vehicle that embodied both romance and hope, powered by this fantastical technology.



“WIZARD OF OZ” The American Fairytale



The train and its desolate station against the vast plains - a classic American image, perfect for our design theme. But there was a snag: we were filming in England. Building the station and a working train in a wheat field seemed like the answer. The train had to be impressive, dwarfing the station and pulling into it majestically - a true Western icon.

However, taking it on location proved impractical for our crew and logistics. So, we pivoted. We built it all on a field next to our existing sets, planting wheat around it to create the illusion of endless plains.

Between Construction and SFX the 106 foot ,58 tonne train standing over 16 feet high was built with a power unit housed within and ran the length of our planted wheat fields with the station & platform built at the center point of the wheat.



The Emerald City.

A daunting task loomed before us. Designing a city for film is fraught with peril – so many fall into the trap of generic, forgettable landscapes. But this wasn't any city. This was Oz, a land of fantastical whimsy. The Emerald City had to be the embodiment of that whimsy, a **dream conjured by a powerful Wizard**. It had to **rise from the landscape** like a singular emerald jewel, a profile etched in the memory of every Ozian, a myth they whispered about with longing. Tricky business indeed!

We knew from the outset that the city's exterior would be crafted through the magic of CGI. This meant getting a head start on the design process. **Detailed illustrations** were paramount, capturing every curve, every flourish, every emerald facet of this fantastical metropolis. These illustrations would be our blueprint, the foundation upon which the VFX team would weave their digital magic.

But the Emerald City wasn't solely a digital creation. A significant portion would be built as a physical set on our backlot. **Seamless integration** between the physical and digital realms was crucial. The design had to ensure the CGI architecture perfectly complemented the structures reaching up a formidable 45 feet, creating a cohesive whole that would transport audiences to the heart of Oz.



The Emerald City Backlot: One Build too many.

Building all those backlots strained my departments. Shiz had truly put us in a bind. The Emerald City, the last and trickiest set, loomed large. It had to be the crown jewel of our narrative, but how could we simplify without sacrificing detail? We'd already overshot the budget on previous sets. We needed to streamline.

Inspiration struck at the memory of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Its Americana style, showcasing the dawn of American modernism and grandeur, felt perfect. What if we created detailed, mass-producible panels to cover every flat surface? Paired with strategically placed giant arches, these deep archways could create the illusion of an endless views through the city. Framing every shot.



The Emerald City Backlot

PLAN

The Emerald City Backlot

Our original vision was grand: Elphaba and Glinda arriving in the heart of the Emerald City on the Train literally driving from the SHIZ country station all the way into the Emerald City backlot. To achieve this, I planned to extend the train tracks seamlessly from the Station set into the Emerald City backlot entrance. Unfortunately, the layout of both sets, dictated by required sun direction, conspired against this dream. My fantasy of physically driving the train was sunk.

Faced with this setback, we needed a new approach. The solution? One of the biggest cranes in the county. We used it to lift the train over and up, positioning it perfectly at the height of the entrance tunnel arch.

Designed for dynamic movement, this first section of the backlot unfolds like a bustling Ozian marketplace. Street vendors hawk fantastical wares, created by our talented set dressers, amidst whimsical beauty and fashion stores. The vibrant scene culminates in a grand archway, leading to Wizamania. Here, the Emerald City's second section takes over, guiding our characters towards the imposing gates of the Wizard's Palace.





The Emerald City Backlot



The Emerald City Backlot's grand finale culminated in the Wizamania stage, a spectacle chronicling the Wizard's fantastical history. The sequence cleverly transitioned from a theatrical performance to a captivating dance number, all orchestrated around the majestic Main Fountain. This centerpiece wasn't just a backdrop; it transformed into a blossoming marvel, rotating and unfolding like a giant flower, while a symphony of water effects cascaded around the dancers.

From this dazzling display, the scene flowed seamlessly towards the imposing entrance steps and grand gates of the Wizard's Palace. The entire Wizamania sequence was a testament to meticulous planning and collaboration across various departments. Meticulously crafted moving scenery elements and the innovative rotating fountain design, all meticulously choreographed within the camera's frame, brought this fantastical scene to life.





The Emerald City Backlot





FINDING A WHIMSICAL EMERALD CITY



The Wizard's Palace Great hall.

Leaving the vibrant energy of Wizamania behind, Elphaba and Glinda enter the imposing Wizard's Palace. Here, the Great Hall needed to evoke a sense of endless journey and intimidation, leading towards the Wizard's throne room.

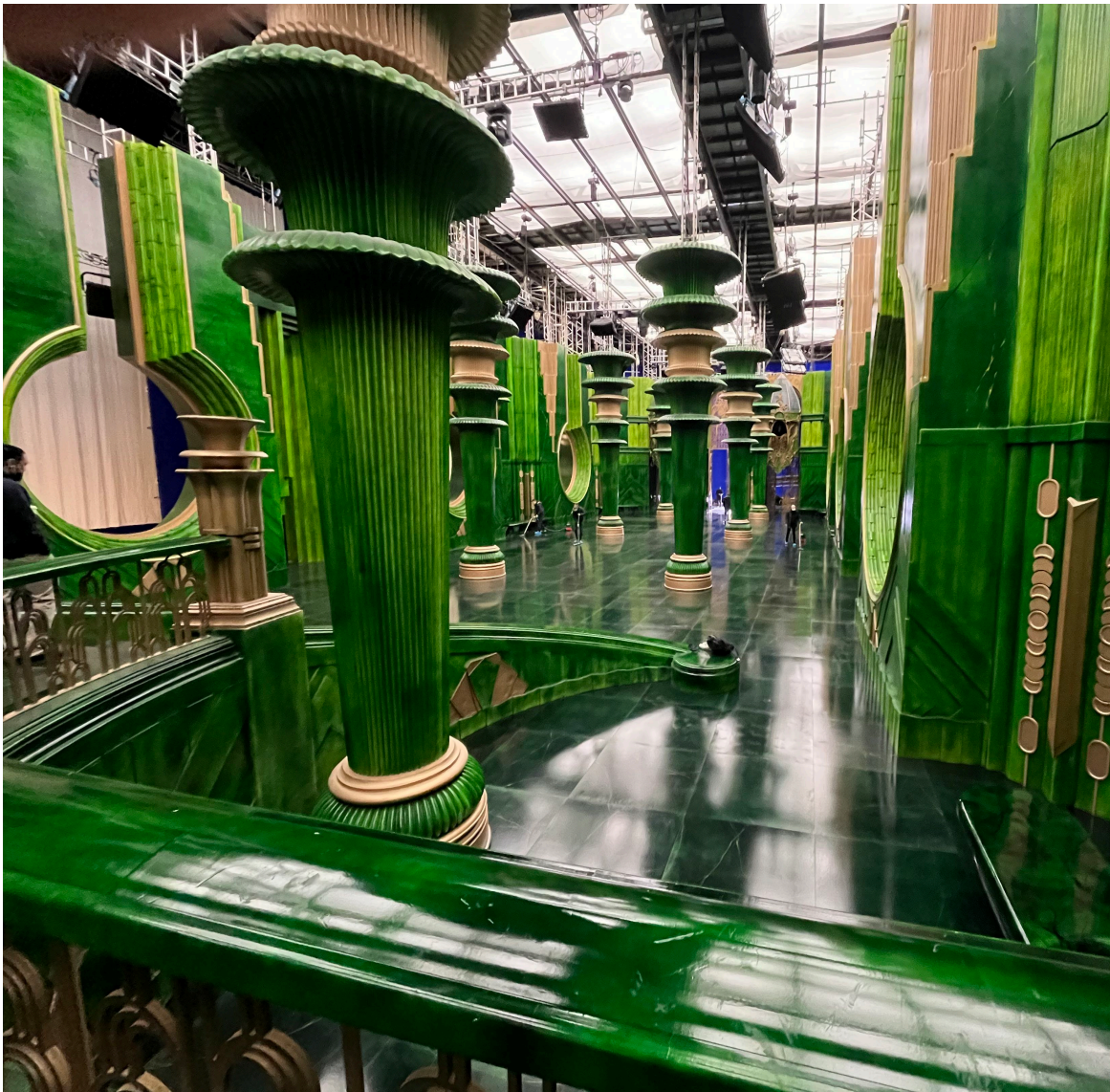
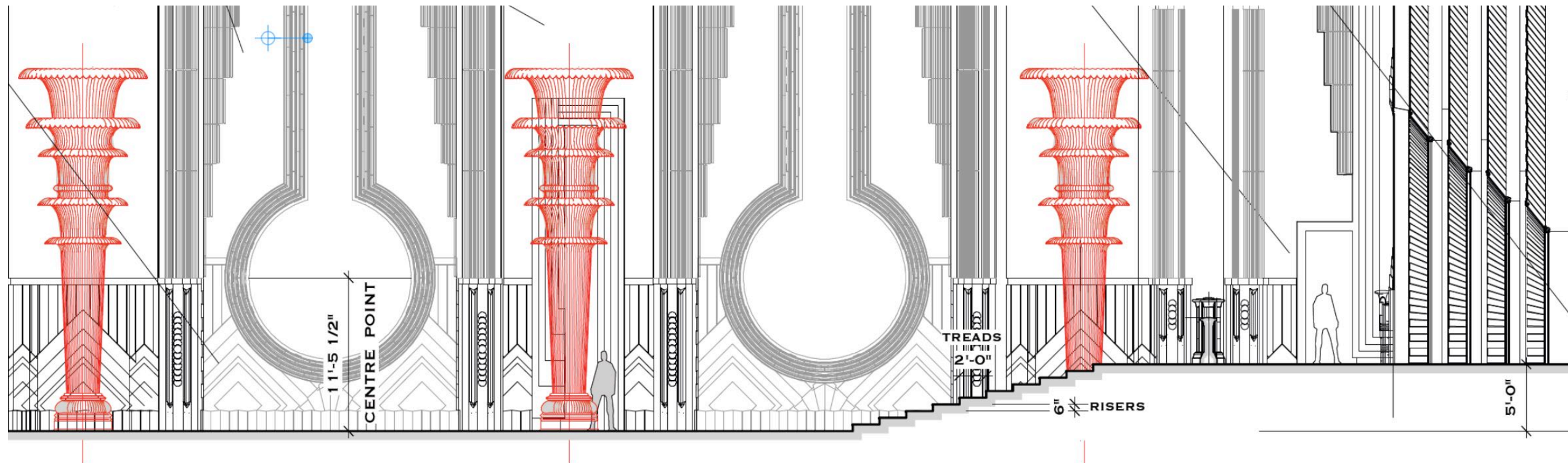
Our vision was to create a space that felt not only vast in length but also overwhelmingly tall, mirroring the grandeur of the giant emerald tower it belonged to. Achieving this required a two-pronged approach.

First, I designed a massive window featuring a vertical architectural element. This, combined with CGI, would extend the sense of height upwards. Additionally, I incorporated giant columns to create a forced perspective. These columns, elongated to match the room's length, would subtly narrow the perceived space as the characters progressed.

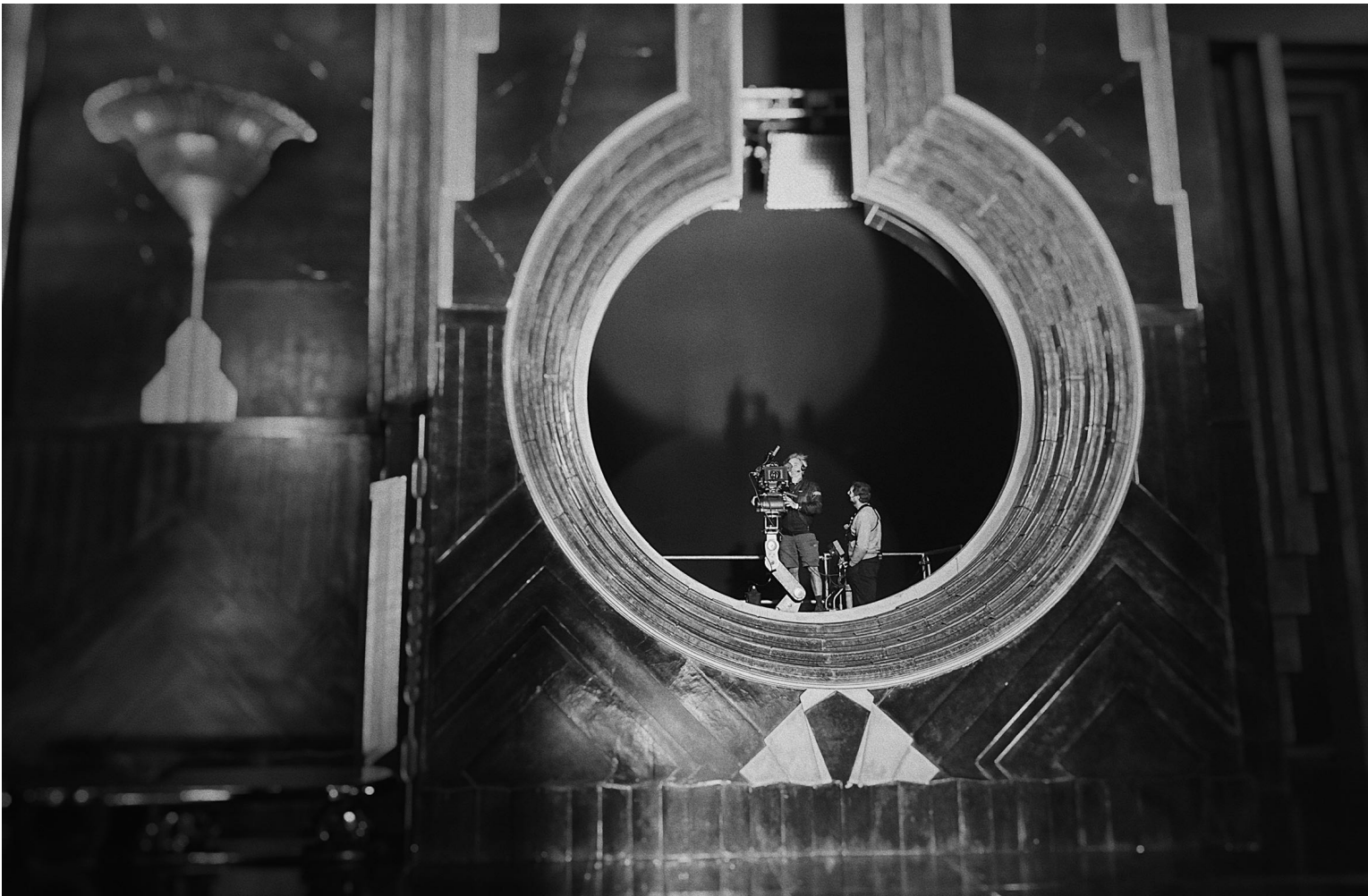
However, the initial all-green design presented a challenge. To add depth and separate visual layers, I knew we needed contrasting tones. This led to collaboration with the scenic department. We experimented with translucent materials, bronze highlights, and the strategic introduction of navy blue. This color palette would maintain the overall emerald feel while injecting much-needed dimension.

Unfortunately, the sheer scale of this set pushed our budget. The solution? Reusability. We planned to repurpose every wall and window for the exterior backlot set, maximizing our resources. This strategy proved successful, allowing us to create this magnificent space within budget.

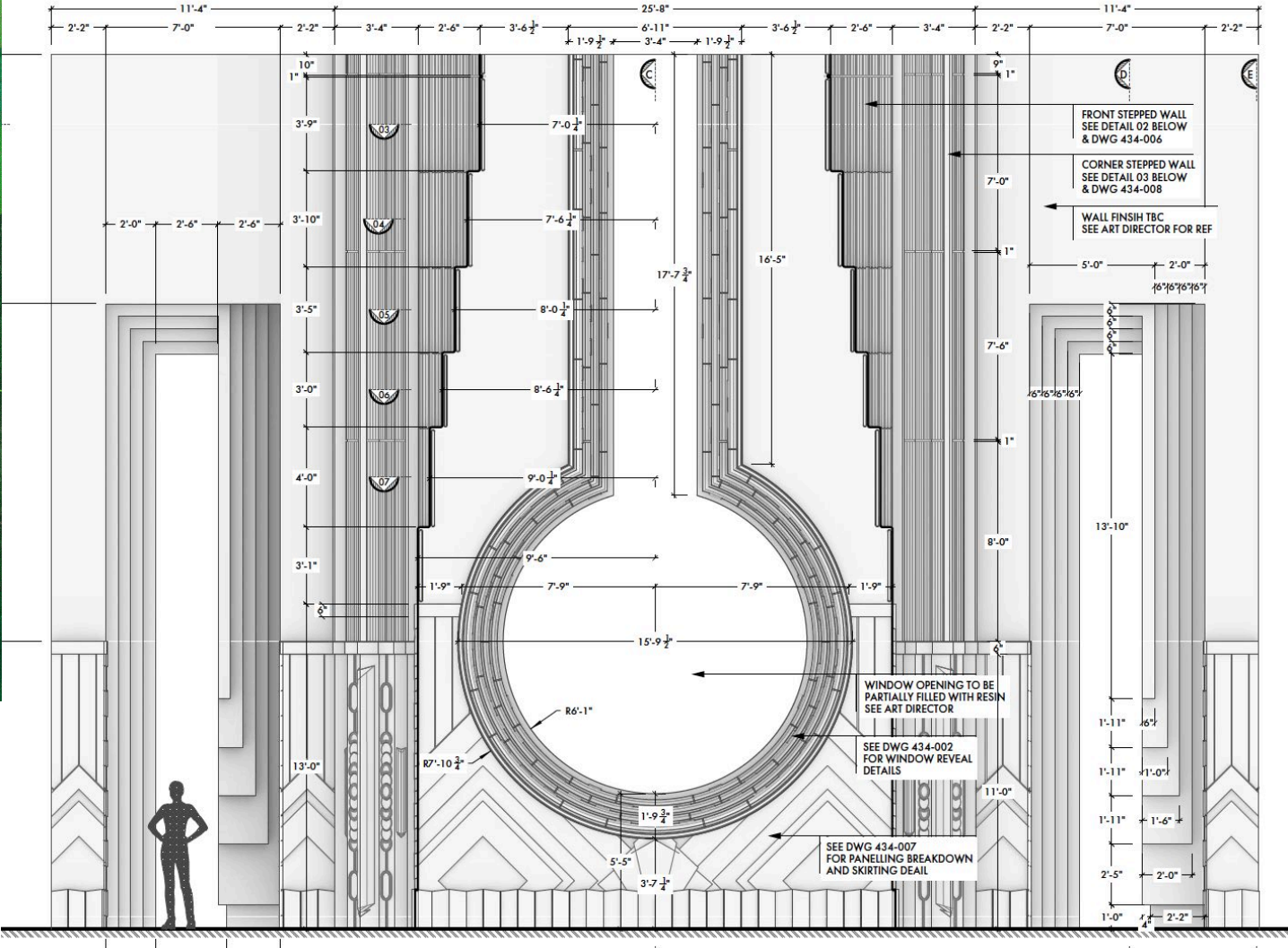




The Wizard's Palace
Great hall.

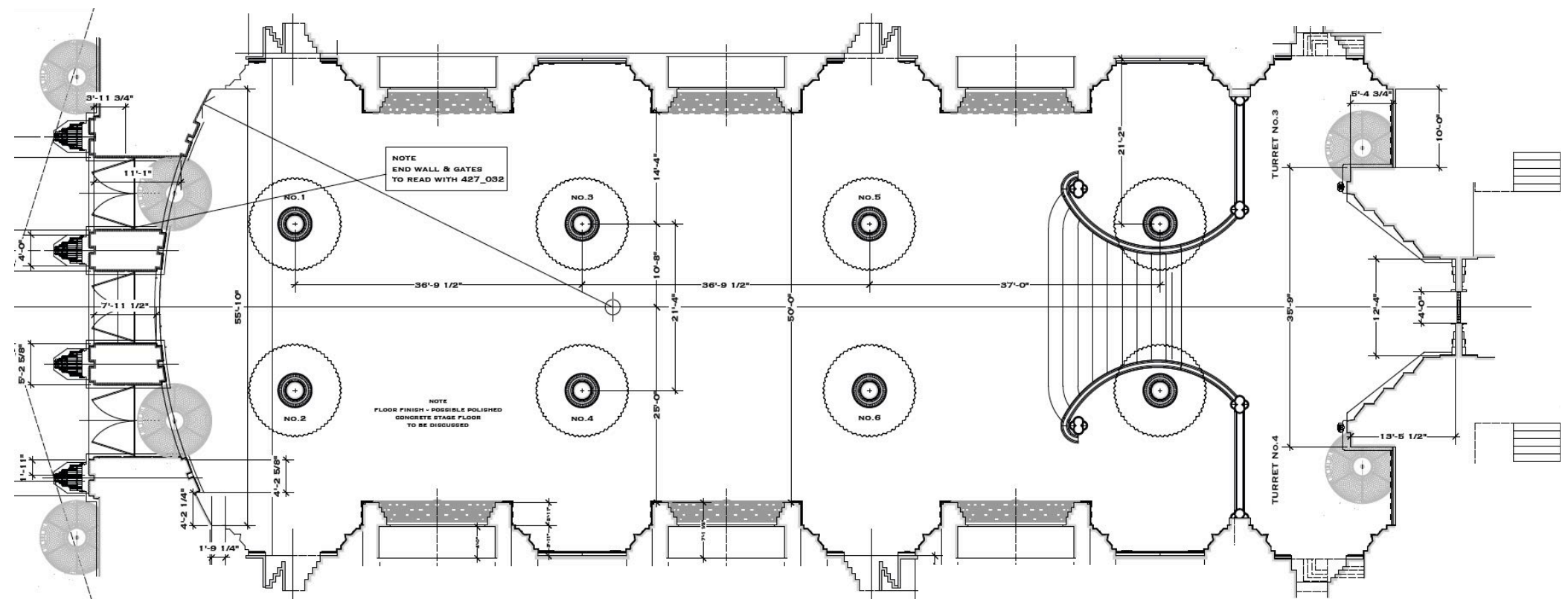


The Wizard's Palace Great hall.
The giant windows





**The Wizard's Palace
Great hall.**

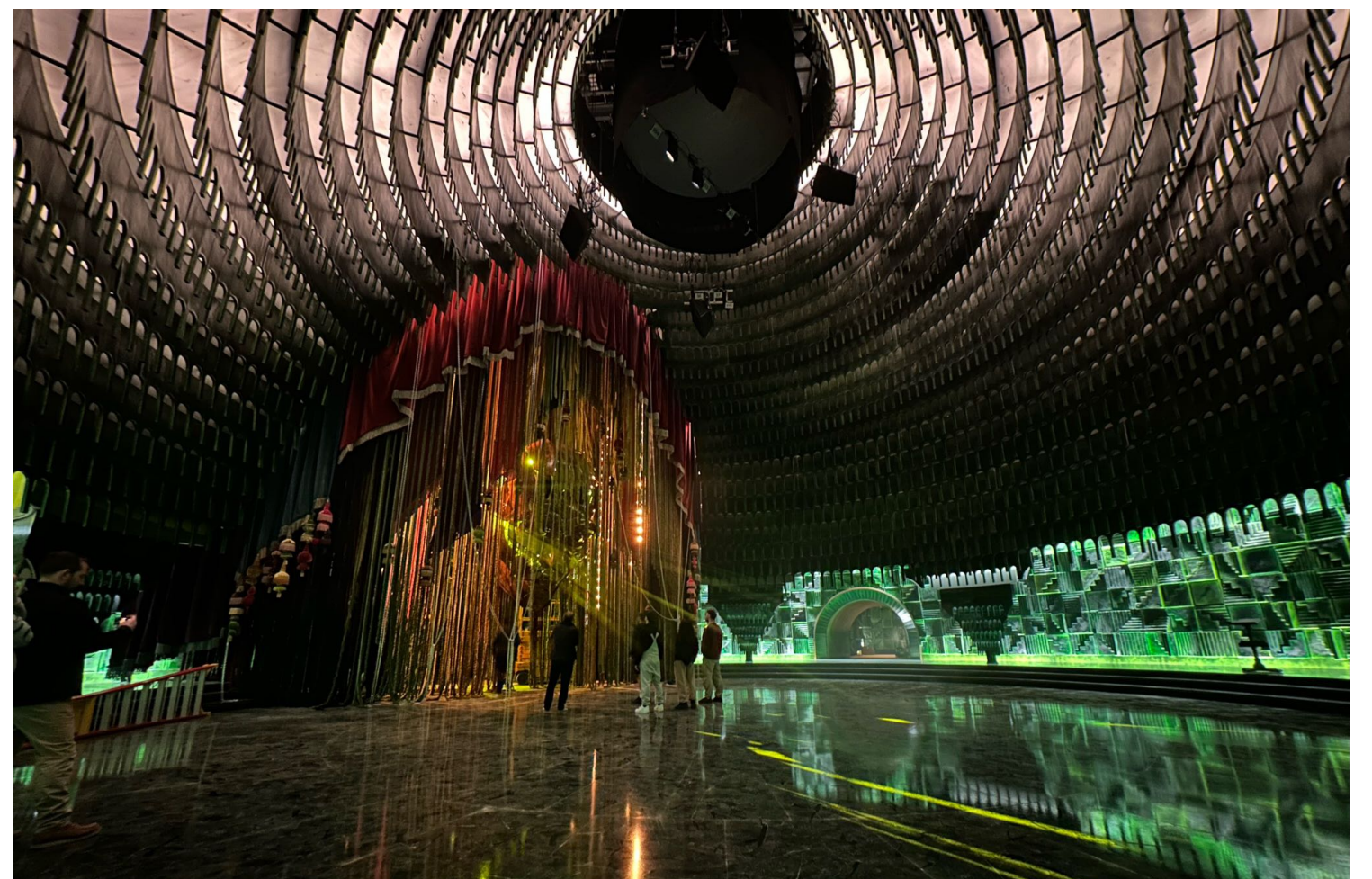


The Wizard's Throne Room: A Modernist Spectacle

The Wizard's Throne Room wasn't just a place to meet the great Oz; it was an intimidation chamber. Early on, I envisioned a **massive, puppeteered mechanical head** dominating the space, a technological marvel that could truly interact with the characters.

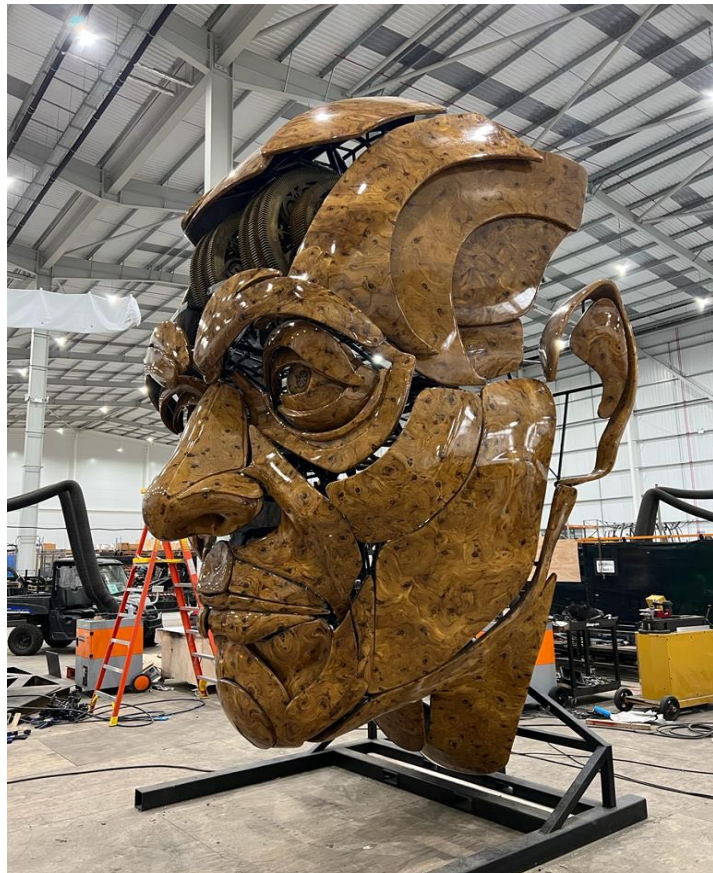
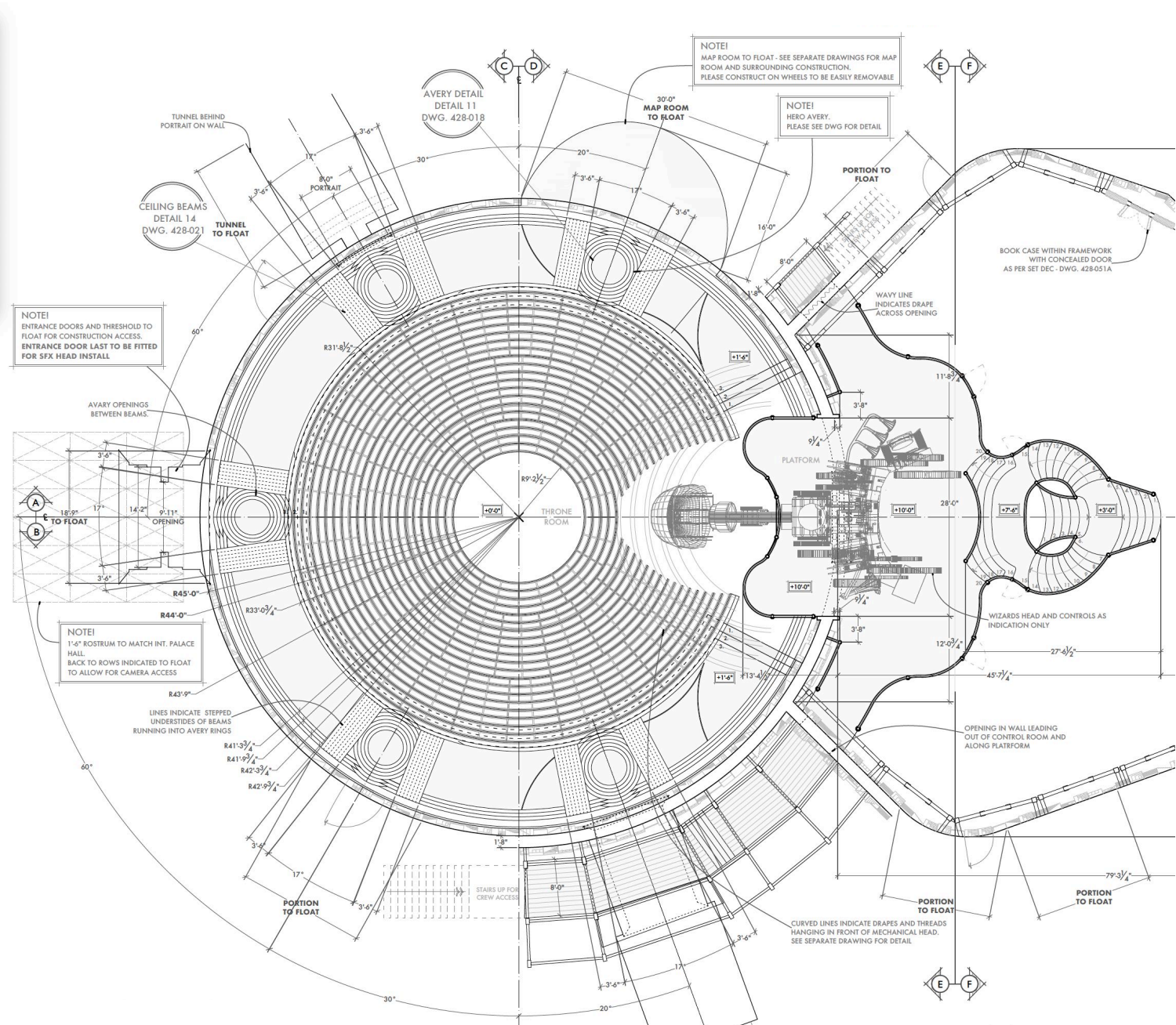
This throne room, however, couldn't be pure fantasy. It needed to reflect the **whimsical realism** of the Wizard's world, a bizarre blend of Oz's magic and his own **modernist future**. Think cathedral soaring towards a vast skylight, but reimagined with layers of architectural rings that slowly ascend, creating a dizzying illusion of vertical distance and perspective.

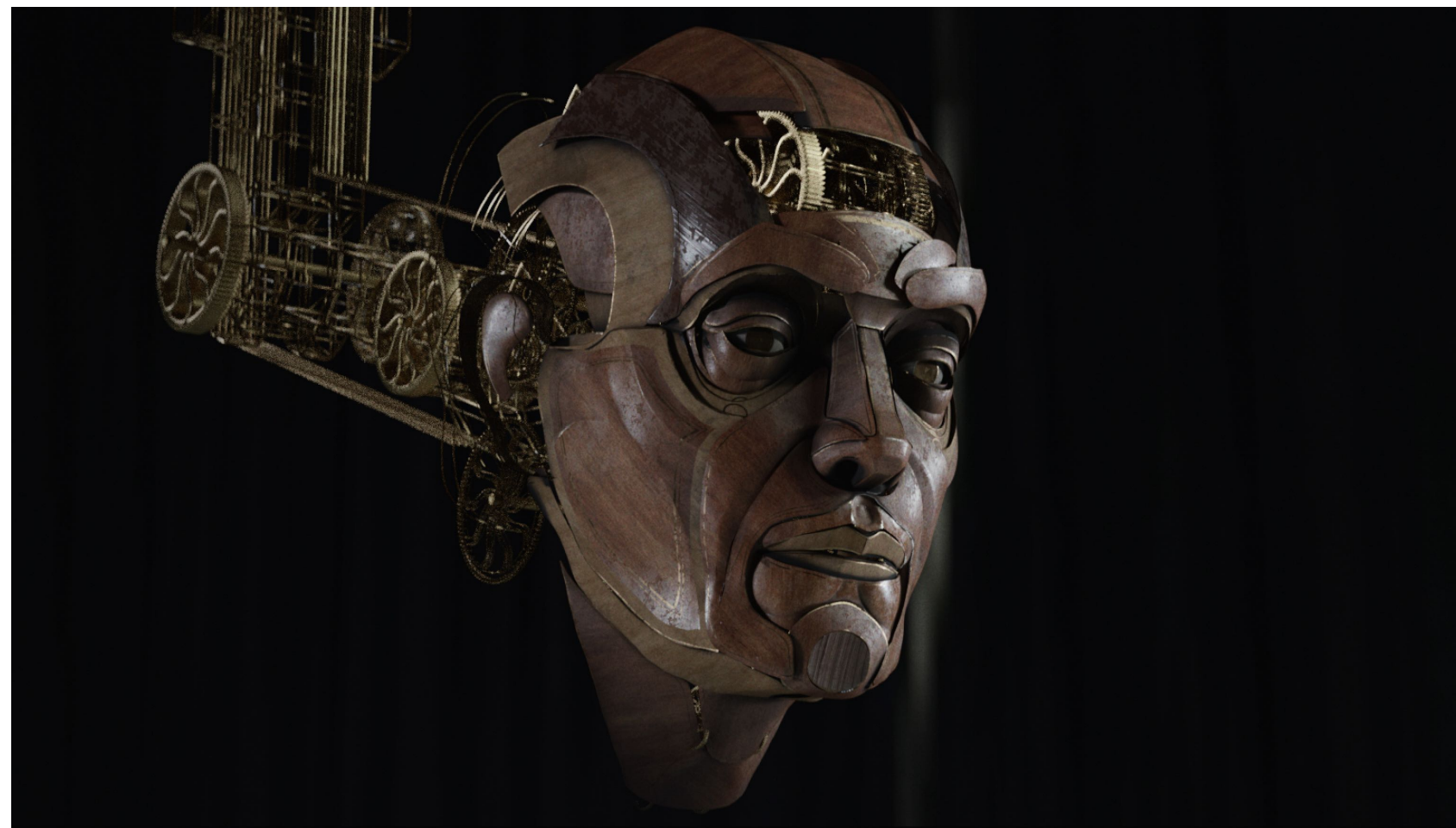
Our talented art directors and SFX teams tackled the challenge of designing a **fully expressive mechanical head**. To heighten the complexity, we conceived of the head pushing through layers of cascading curtains, a **living string sculpture** that would breathe life and movement into the giant visage. This "man behind the curtain" effect was crucial – the Wizard, after all, was a mere carnival illusionist at heart.



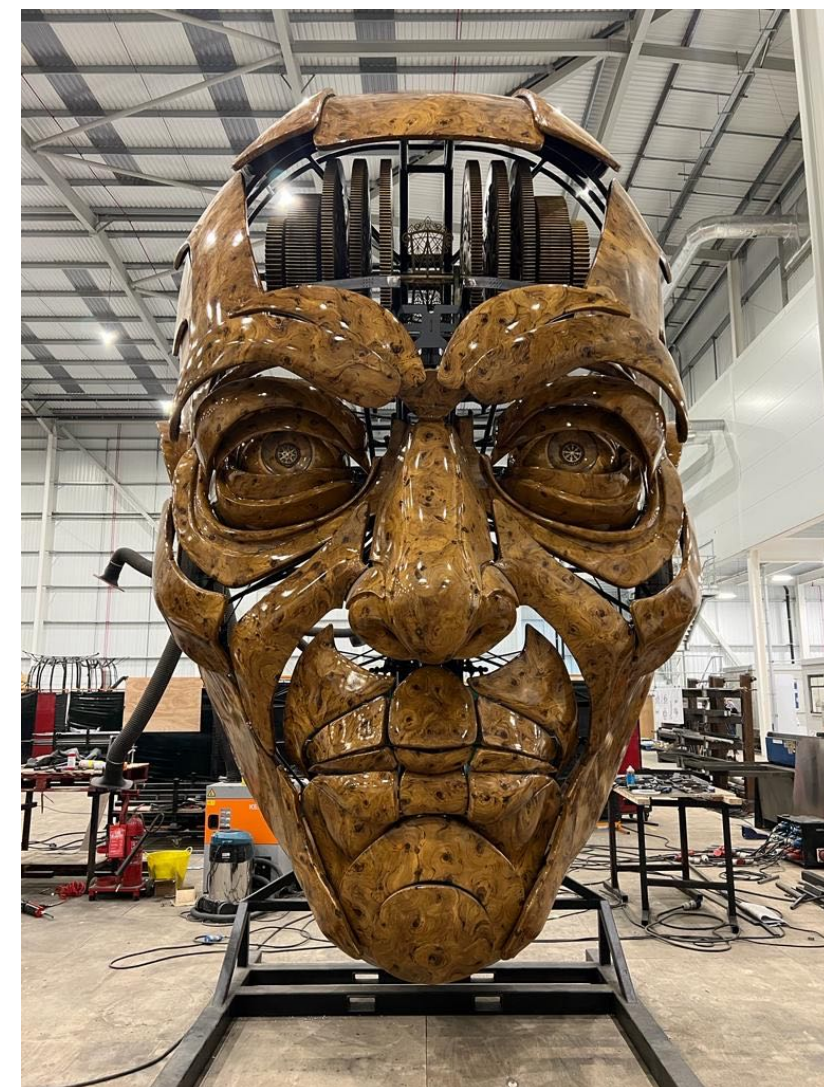
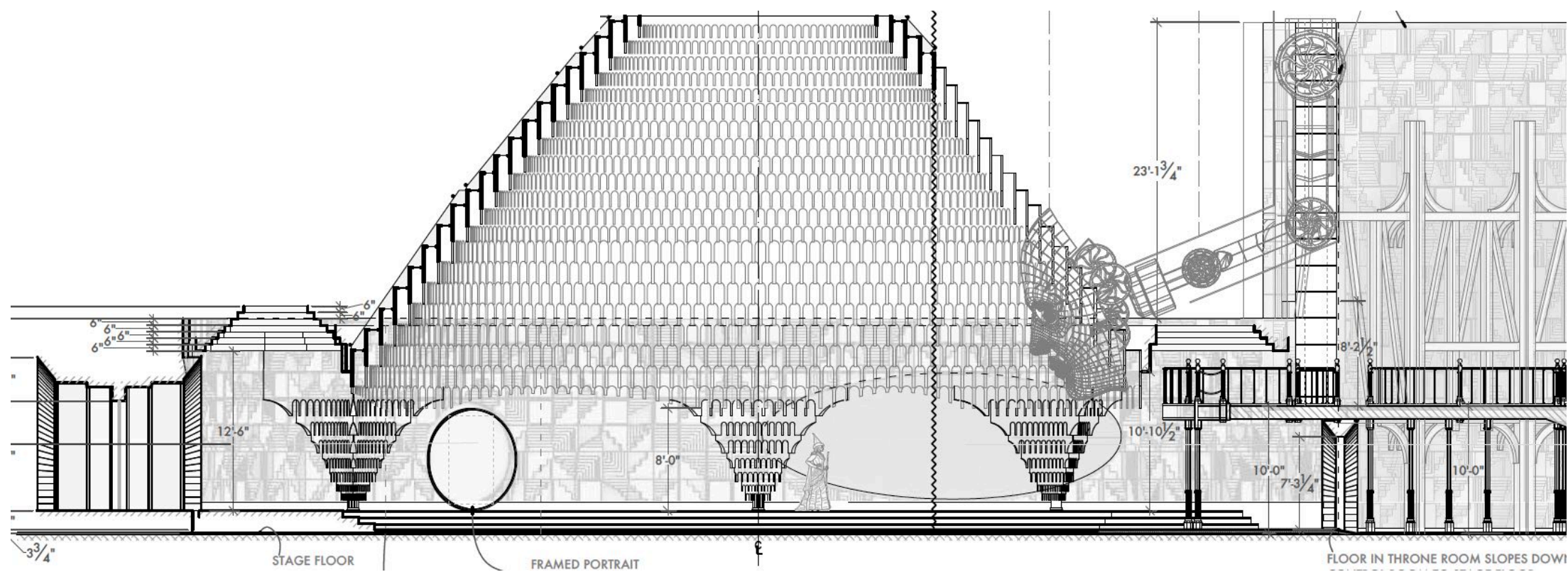


The Wizard's Throne Room





The Wizard's Throne Room:



The Map Room: A Magical Illusion

Within the Wizard's Palace Throne room lies a grand Map Room. An intricate map, seemingly painted directly onto the walls, chronicles every corner of the wondrous land of Oz. In the Map's center stands the Emerald City.

Ever the showman, the Wizard proposes a spectacular scene to unveil his plan for Oz's future: a performance within a map itself. Imagine this! The flat map on the wall transforms before your very eyes. No longer a mere painting, it becomes a three-dimensional world carved right into the wall, a miniature OZ explaining the entire layout.

A Grand Illusion in Motion:

We envision the Wizard not simply pointing at this magical map, but stepping **into** it. A whimsical dance sequence then unfolds within this miniature OZ, showcasing the fabled Yellow Brick Road winding its way through fantastical landscapes. The song number "A Sentimental Man" starts. The roof of the Map lifts away, revealing a breathtaking transition from a vibrant sunset sky to a moonlit Oz. The dance continues under the soft glow of the magical moonlight in silhouette.

All in Camera.



The Map Room: A Magical Illusion

To create the illusion of an endless landscape and sky, a forced perspective model of the Land of Oz would be built. Model makers would construct Oz at varying scales, depending on its location within the space. This space would be an egg-shaped inner half-dome, with a scenic sunset painted on the hard top interior. During the dance number, the hydraulically-lifted sky would reveal a moonlit scene painted on a gauze behind which the Wizard could make a final, silhouetted appearance. All this would be achieved in-camera.

