



# KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

BY SCOTT CHAMBLISS, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

WRITER / DIRECTOR BILL CONDON's impressive resume includes the films CHICAGO (2002), DREAMGIRLS (2006), THE GREATEST SHOWMAN (2017) and BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (2017). His latest feature is KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN (2025), based on the acclaimed 1976 novel by Argentine author Manuel Puig as well as the 1992 Tony Award winning Broadway musical by John Kander and Fred Ebb, with a book by Terrence McNally. The show won several Tonys. Condon's new original adaptation is an entirely fresh take on the source material.

THIS NEW SPIDER WOMAN film is in fact two highly contrasting period movies in one: a 1970s Sidney Lumet-style harsh prison drama interwoven with a glossy Technicolor late 1940s musical extravaganza, MGM style. It is an unusual combination to say the least, and each period film required its own uniquely heightened visual storytelling style for KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN as a whole to succeed. Rather than employing current day filmmaking styles and techniques, to add authenticity Condon chose to mimic techniques of the era in which each period story is set.





The Ext Prison Courtyard- Location in Montevideo, Uruguay.





Our Ext Prison Courtyard and Entrance location. The exterior architectural surfaces are as we found them.







Molina enters the prison wing for the first time.





Seen above is our Int Prison Corridor location in its cleaned but otherwise untouched state. Below is the same space in its completed state for camera. Notice there is no longer a partial wall interrupting the full length of the space.











Molina meets his cellmate Valentin for the first time.





Much later in the story, both the jail cell itself and the relationship of the prisoners in it have both warmed.





IT'S ARGENTINA IN 1981 during a brutal military dictatorship. Imprisoned political dissident Valentin and gay department store window dresser named Molina are forced to be cellmates. Molina survives the times dwelling in an internalized fantasy world of old movies. He invites the taciturn Valentin to "watch" his favorite 1940s musical film with him right there in the cell. "How?" Valentin asks. "I will tell you the story," Molina responds, "and our imaginations will do the rest." The movie magic begins.



MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY was home base for all non-musical scenes in our film, including our Int Cell soundstage set. The massive and dauntingly decrepit Carcel de Miguelete (above) built in 1888 provided our interior and exterior prison location sets. Supervising Art Director Maite Zugarramurdi, Construction Coordinator Federico Forcell, and Lead Painter Guillermo Stoll and their teams worked wonders overhauling the crumbling pigeon-infested locale to suit our needs.



KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN's sixteen musical sequences were shot on individual sets on New Jersey sound stages over a four week period. The extraordinary Jennifer Lopez shines as the glamorous fictional 1940s movie star Ingrid Luna, who is Molina's idol. Diego Luna is the angry revolutionary Valentin, and Tonatiuh portrays his flamboyant cellmate Molina. Each gives a stellar performance.



VIVID PERIOD TECHNICOLOR HUES undiluted by contemporary taste were what director Bill Condon had in mind for the fantasy musical sequences. Aurora's Boudoir set (above) in hyper-saturated princess blue, butter cream and peach tones is the audience's first view of the musical film in Molina's mind. The period interiors of Dorothy Draper and Andre Arbus were strong design inspiration for us.





Int Aurora's Boudoir

Illustration by Dean Sherriff





Int Aurora's Boudoir





Int Aurora's Boudoir





Int Aurora's Bath





Int Charm Ballroom





Int Charm Ballroom





AS THE DAYS DRAG ON in the cell the two men become more obsessed with the movie tale, growing closer in the process. The musical film's settings roll out: a glamorous ballroom (top) and a luxurious supper club (bottom) show off movie star Ingrid Luna's versatile prowess on the different dance floors. All are designed in the spare, stylized shorthand of 1940s movie sound stage sets.



Illustration by Dean Sherriff













Illustration by Matthew Cunningham

Ext Lair of the Spider Woman





A SINISTER JUNGLE COTTAGE indicates the Lair of the Spider Woman must be nearby.



Both sets aspired to maximum old movie spookiness.





## SPIDER WOMAN'S LAIR

### SPIDER WOMAN'S LAIR

Painted Backdrop



Note carved rock formations and large scale dead tree.

Obvious artificiality is key here.



From above the camera pushes through foreground foliage and reveals a ruined arch and a crumbling stairway, overtaken by the jungle.



Framed by the arch is a huge glistening spider web.



At the center of the web is The Spider Woman, alluring and deadly.

She stands attached to the web in wait for the next handsome victim of her deadly kiss.



KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN had a tight \$35 million production budget, requiring Construction Coordinator Lee Christie-Irvine and his crew to be endlessly ingenious. The same was true for Lead Scenic Jackson Groom, his specialty painter Mick Rossman, and their entire team. New York scenic artists' expertise in old-school theatrical paint techniques gave our musical number settings a palpable patina of period charm and authenticity.

In the jungle setting, our tireless greens coordinator Mike Thompson brought knowledge, taste, and endless resourcefulness to the task of building an intentionally artificial looking 1940s sound stage jungle. His witty combination of real and manufactured plant materials was inventive, sly and fun.





Ext South American Village Square

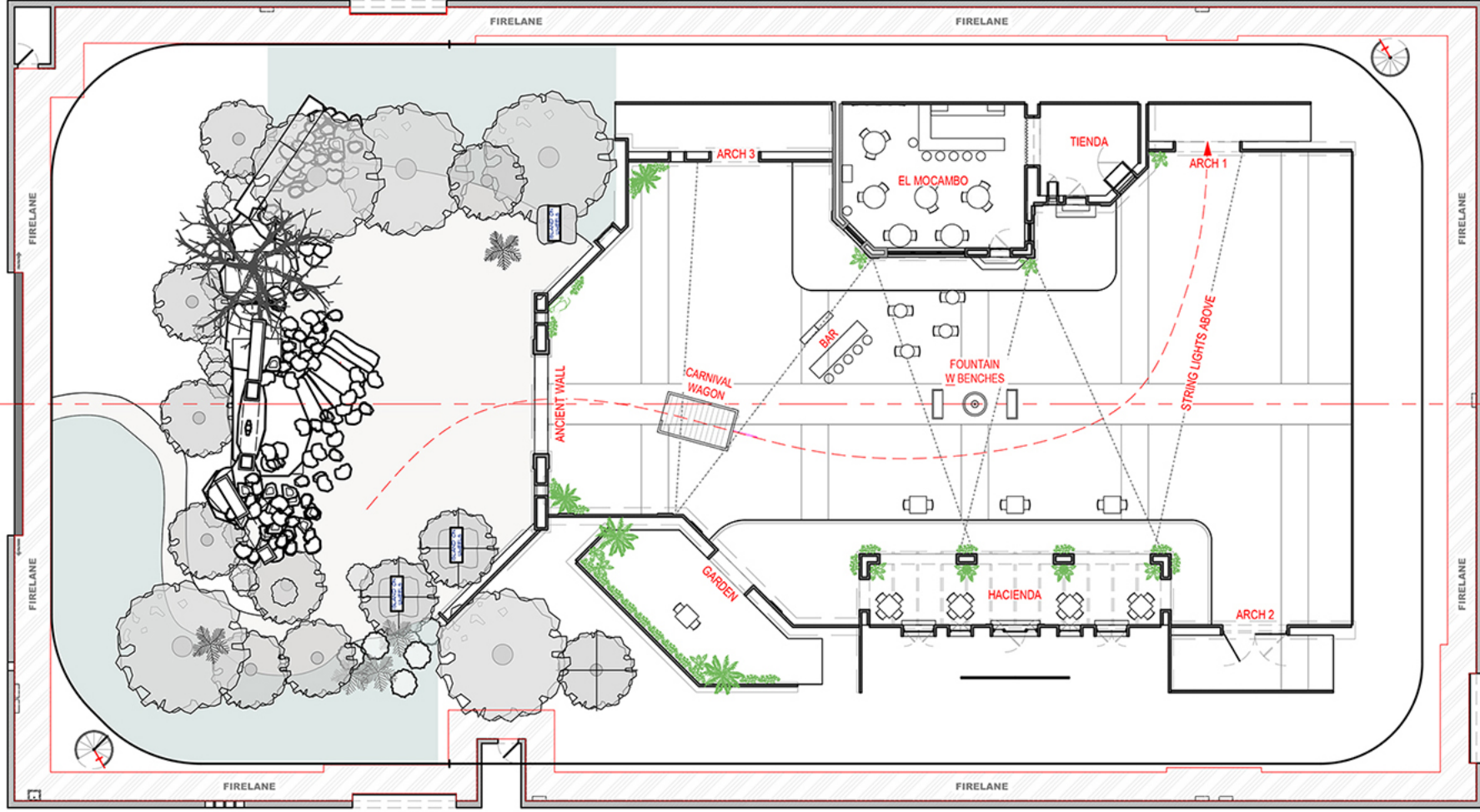




WHILE PRISONERS CONTENT with forced labor in the grim Ext Prison Courtyard (below), the 40s musical contains an Ext South American Village Square (above) where singing, dancing and romancing take place. Yet danger lies just beyond the square's central arch: the looming Jungle is home to the very alluring and deadly Spider Woman. An elaborate carnival sequence filled this sound stage set, which was our largest in the film. Comprised of two connected stages, the space was turned over to house the expansive grand finale Int Golden Stairway set.







SC. 59 (DAY) - AURORA AND ARMANDO WALK THROUGH STREET FAIR, TRAILED BY HEADRESS MAN  
 SC. 61 (DAY) - ARMANDO GETS DRINKS AND JOINS AURORA, DRINK IS SPIKED BY HEADRESS MAN

**REVISED**  
**04/08/24**

|                         |                                        |                                          |                                                                          |                                    |  |                        |                   |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------|
| DIRECTOR<br>BILL CONDON | PRODUCTION DESIGNER<br>SCOTT CHAMBLISS | SUPERVISING ART DIRECTOR<br>CHARLEY BEAL | LOCATION<br>CINELASE STAGE 3 - 21 CAVEN POINT AVE, JERSEY CITY, NJ 07305 | DRAWING:<br><b>DIRECTOR'S PLAN</b> |  | DATE:<br>03/27/24      | SHEET NO:<br>DP-2 |
|                         |                                        |                                          |                                                                          |                                    |  | REVISED:<br>04/08/2024 |                   |



**EXT VILLAGE / COLOR + TEXTURE PALETTE 1**  
CLUB MOCAMBO, LA TIENDA, CHURCH ARCH & CHURCH



**1. Club Mocambo**



**2. La Tienda**



**3. Church Arch**

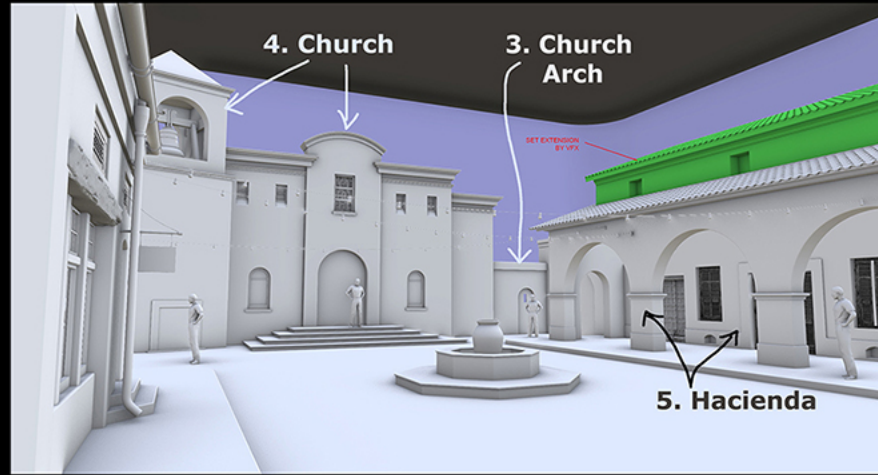


**4. Church**



## EXT VILLAGE / COLOR + TEXTURE PALETTE 2

### CHURCH, CHURCH ARCH & HACIENDA



4. Church



3. Church Arch



5. Hacienda



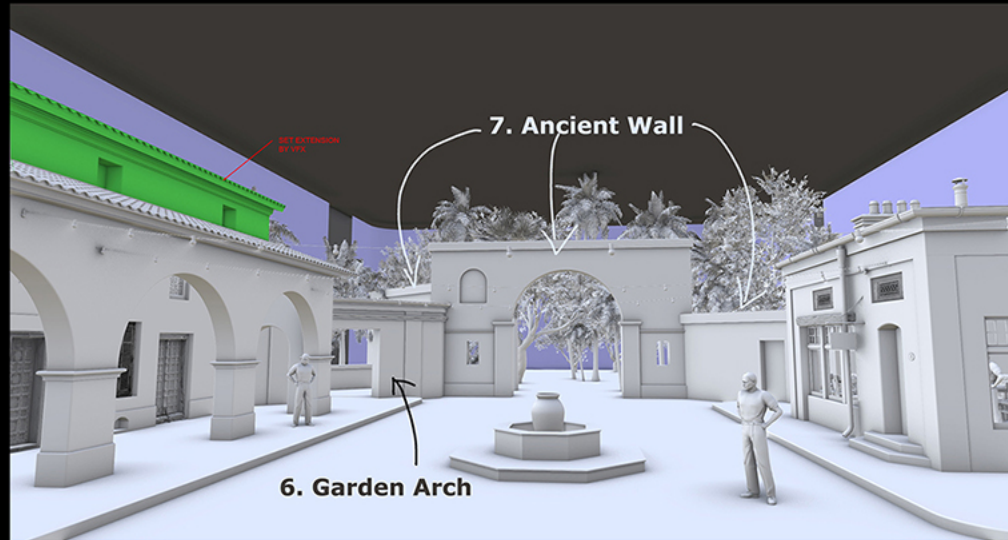


## EXT VILLAGE / COLOR + TEXTURE PALETTE 3

### GARDEN ARCH & ANCIENT WALL



**6. Garden Arch**



**7. Ancient Wall**





Ext South American Village Square





Illustration by Andrew Reeder

Ext. South American Village Square





Illustration by Dean Sherriff

Int Palace Hotel Suite





Int Palace Hotel Suite





WITH THE PALACE HOTEL SUITE shown here and with every other set in our New Jersey shoot, the marvelous duo of Set Decorator Andrew Baseman and Assistant Decorator Roxanne Kratt with their adept shoppers amassed a treasure vault of period furniture and decor to choose just the right pieces from.

ROCK-SOLID Supervising Art Director Charley Beal with ace Art Directors Paul Kelly and Kevin Rupnik addressed the pressures of a short prep and a low budget in building 16 large period sets at lightning speed.







Illustration by Dean Sherriff

Int Palace Hotel Suite





Int Film Noir Prison Fantasy



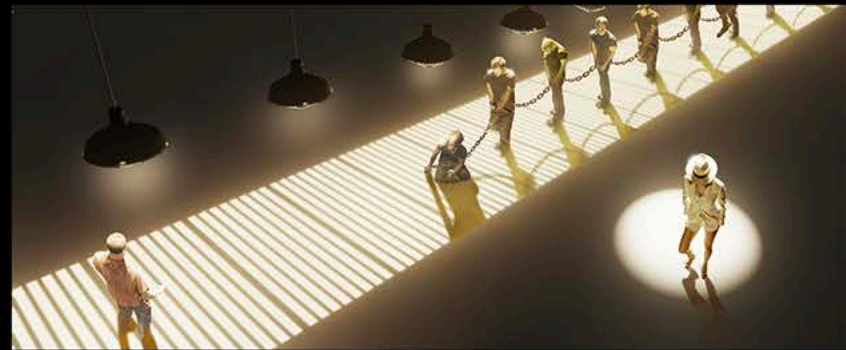


Illustration by Dean Sherriff

IN A MOMENT of terrifying anxiety a panicked Molina enters an emotional space where reality and fantasy unavoidably blur. Lucky for him Jennifer Lopez as movie star Ingrid Luna appears and guides him through it.

With the able support of Art Department Coordinator Julia Hickman and her team, our Assistant Art Directors Christine Lois, Victoria Ruskin, Derek Hass and Joseph Tenga powered through continuously changing choreography decisions which resulted in daily design revisions for most of our musical number sets throughout our compressed preproduction time. Business as usual of course, no matter the scale of the film.

Expert Set Designer and Concept Illustrator Andrew Reeder was a significant contributor to the efficiency and creative depth of our daily design process on the film. Working with trusted longtime collaborators who are inspiringly creative such as Andrew is one of the chief pleasures of being a production designer.







Int El Mocambo Dive Bar



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SONY

Int El Mocambo Dive Bar



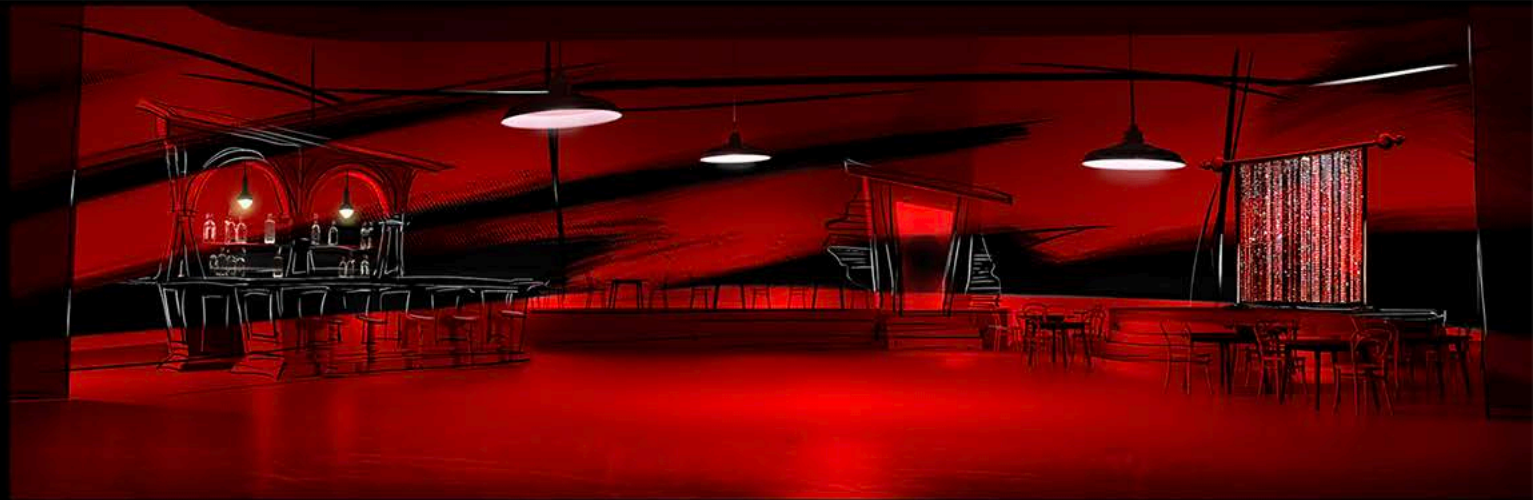


Illustration by Dean Sherriff

PRISON REALITY and the old movie's storyline begin to merge in the two prisoners' minds as Molina continues to weave his tale. In the vividly cartoonish red and black dive bar set Ms. Lopez as Aurora is looking for love...while back in his cell Molina is doing just the same.

THE FILM'S CLIMAX shows Molina's personal story transmuted into a classic movie musical grand finale. After a series of transformative encounters, Molina will climb a golden staircase (top and bottom left) to at last discover the truest love of his life.

Both sets shown here required large scale traditional hand-painted backdrops to surround the sets. We proceeded in the traditional manner, with no printing involved. Walter Zylinski and Peter Miller were the masterful key scenics. Our marvelous DP Tobias Schliessler lit the red and black bar to perfection, while Broadway lighting stars Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer brought the golden stairway set to vivid life.







Int Golden Stairway Stage Set





Int Golden Stairway Stage Set

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LAN





Int Golden Stairway Stage Set



MORE AND MORE, the musical fantasy begins to reflect the danger, the pain, and the terror that Molina and Valentin are experiencing.

The numbers grow edgier, their environments more fractured and shadowed, their romanticized beauty undercut by cold aloofness.

It's funny how a lack of practical resources like time and money can inadvertently sharpen a designer's creative sensitivity.

Turning perceived disadvantages into opportunities for new ideas is a crucial activity for a designer on any scale of project. At the end of the day, the absence of all of the elements we wanted but utterly lacked for the "Only In The Movies" finale set gave the environment the gravity of a modern architectural ruin. It was the ideal visual metaphor for Molina's end-of-life hallucination



SO A FANTASY TALE that began in a sugar coated Princess's boudoir ends in an expressionistic super saturated primary colored three-dimensional abstract void masquerading as a dark take on a Ziegfeld Follies "beautiful girls" number.

How fitting for a very personal bed time story. Sometimes we end up in places we never anticipate.

