

BALLAD OF A SMALL PLAYER

A FILM BY EDWARD BERGER

NINE HOURS

NETFLIX

GOOD CHAOS

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
& SET DECORATOR
JONATHAN HOULDING

SUPERVISING ART DIRECTOR
ZOE LEE TAK-NGA

ART DIRECTOR
JACKY LEUNG

ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR
GLORIA CHEUNG HOI KI

STANDBY & ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR
PAULA LO

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
NONONINO TIN

SCENIC ARTIST
LO CHI KIT

TITLE ARTIST
NIC BENNS

‘The Ballad of a Small Player’ is an operatic, haunting tale of luck, deception, and fate. ‘Lord Doyle’, a fugitive British conman, drifts through Macau’s casinos, gambling recklessly in search of meaning. His world shifts when he meets Dao-Ming, a mysterious woman who offers a chance at redemption, or something darker. As fortune turns, reality blurs in this hypnotic exploration of obsession, illusion, and the seductive pull of chance.

Designing and decorating *The Ballad of a Small Player* was both an honour and the challenge of a lifetime. The film explores contrasts, the bombastic world of Macau’s casinos against the inner turmoil of Lord Doyle, and the fragility of love and loss, addiction and redemption. Capturing these extremes with coherence, authenticity, and emotional depth was central to the production design.

The film reflects stark contradictions: local cultural mysticism alongside luxury-brand capitalism. Locals risking their last dime while billionaires lose millions in a single sitting. Across four major hotel complexes, each with its own elaborate theme, we intervened with designs that resonated emotionally, maintaining rhythm and unity amid the overwhelming spectacle.

Shooting on live casino floors quickly became officially off limits and handling prop money ran the risk of being arrested. To overcome this, we adapted a local casino’s video wall as a temporary volume stage and discovered a couple of derelict, long-disused casinos, which we transformed and dressed to accommodate longer, more complex scenes.

In contrast, on Lamma Island, the Dao Ming houseboat set was crafted entirely by hand on a floating pontoon under intense heat and humidity. It became a space of quiet reflection and a visual counterpoint to Macau’s chaos.

Of course, this document shows only a fraction of the extraordinary scale of work carried out by the team. The collaboration between design, set decoration, construction, painters, props, and scenic painters was exceptional. *The Ballad of a Small Player* challenged us and inspired our best work, it was a privilege to bring this world to life with such remarkable and talented people.

Jonathan Houlding (Production Designer)



THE RAINBOW CASINO



ILLUSTRATION FOR THE RAINBOW CASINO - JH



DRESSED SET



DRESSED SET

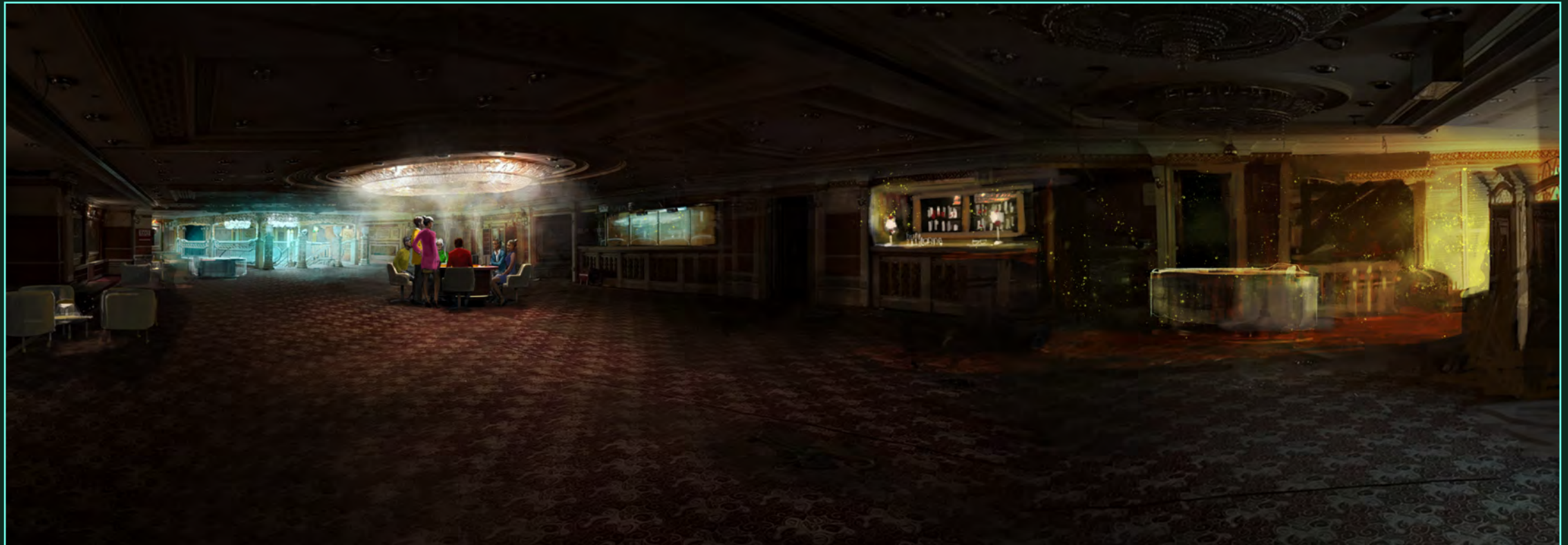


ILLUSTRATION FOR THE RAINBOW CASINO - JH





ILLUSTRATION FOR VARIOUS CASINO SETS - JH



ILLUSTRATION FOR LORD DOYLE'S HOTEL SUITE - JH



SET STILL



FOOD STYLING

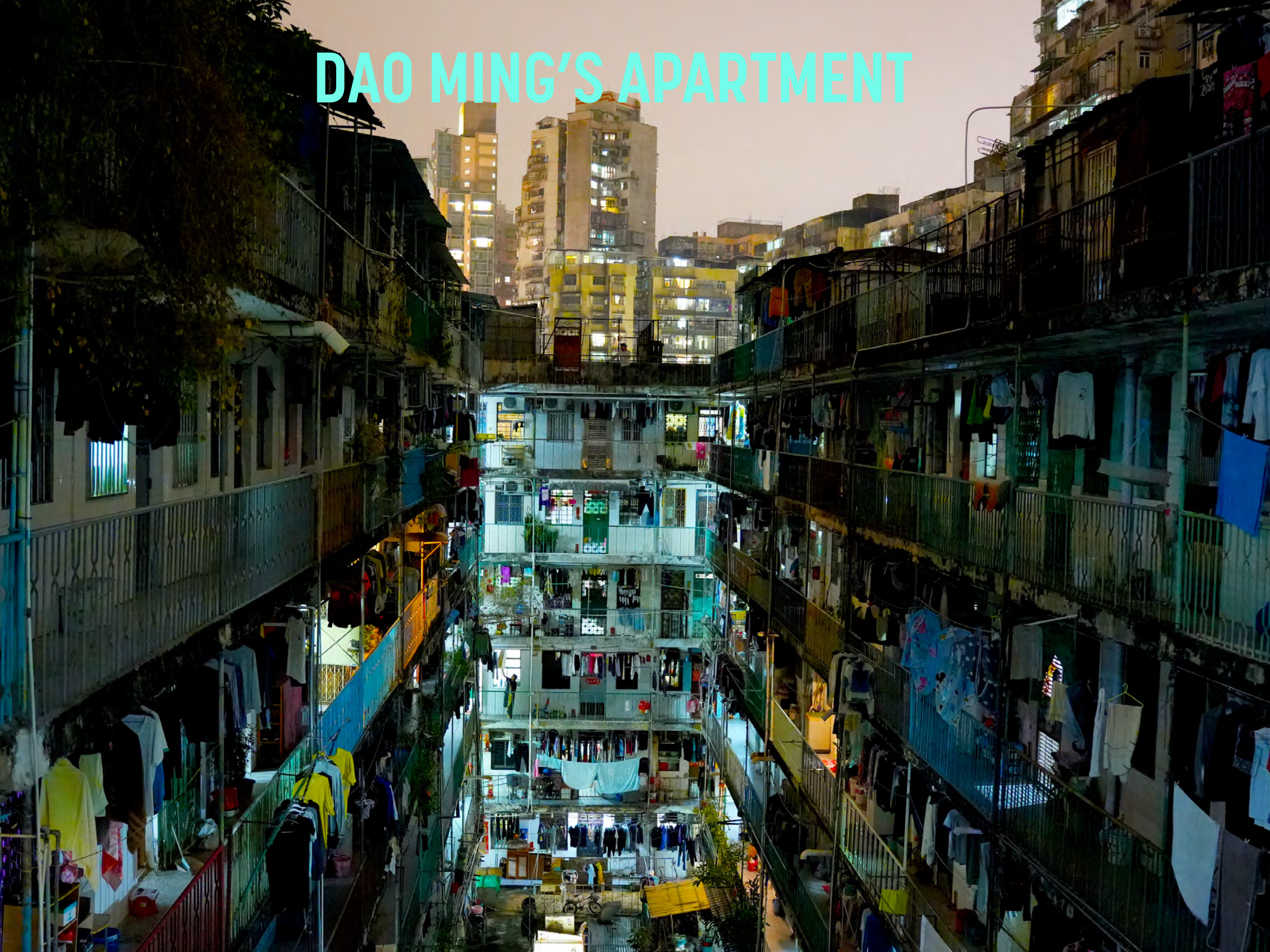


DRESSED SET



TEMPORARY VOLUME STAGE AT MGM CASINO

DAO MING'S APARTMENT





ILLUSTRATIONS - JH





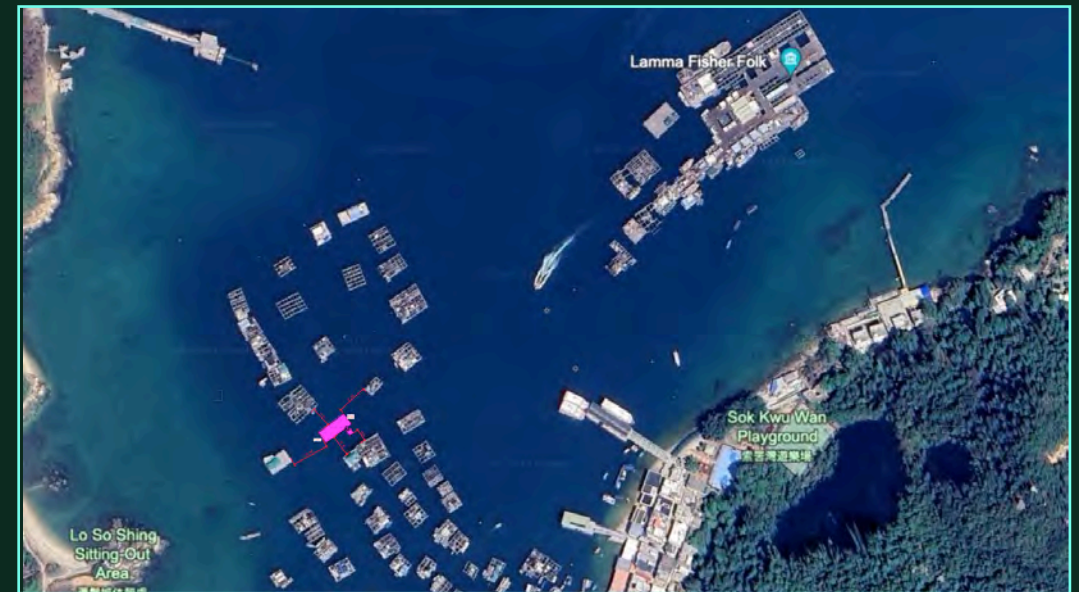
DRESSED SET

DAO MING'S COTTAGE

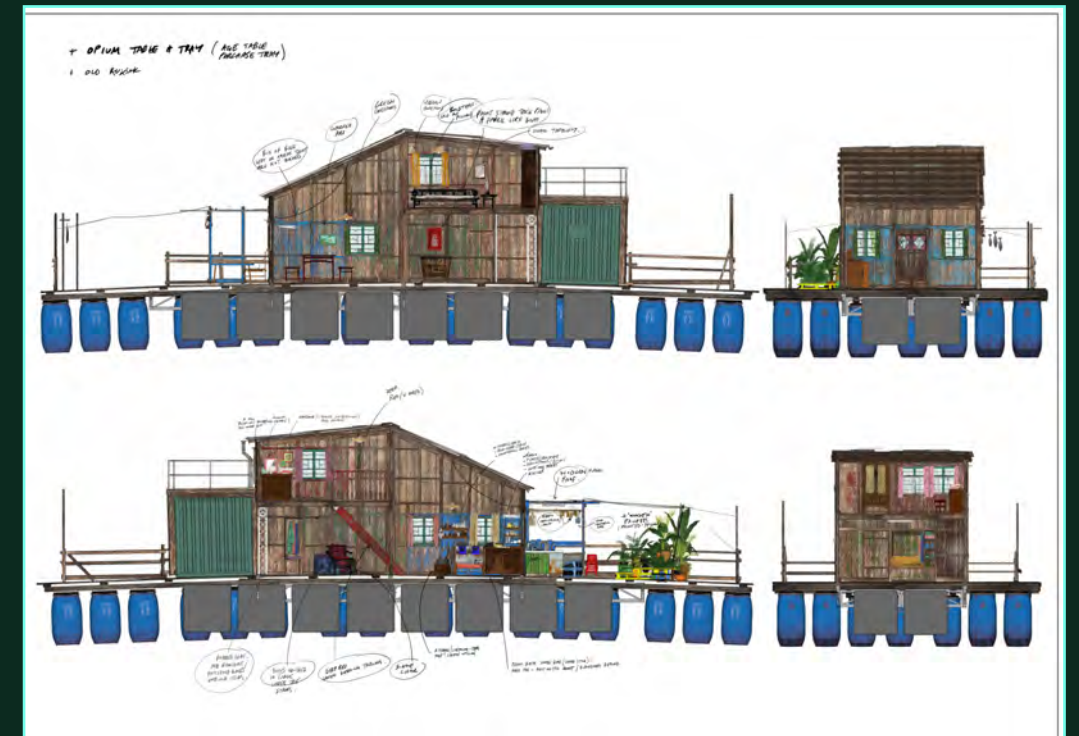




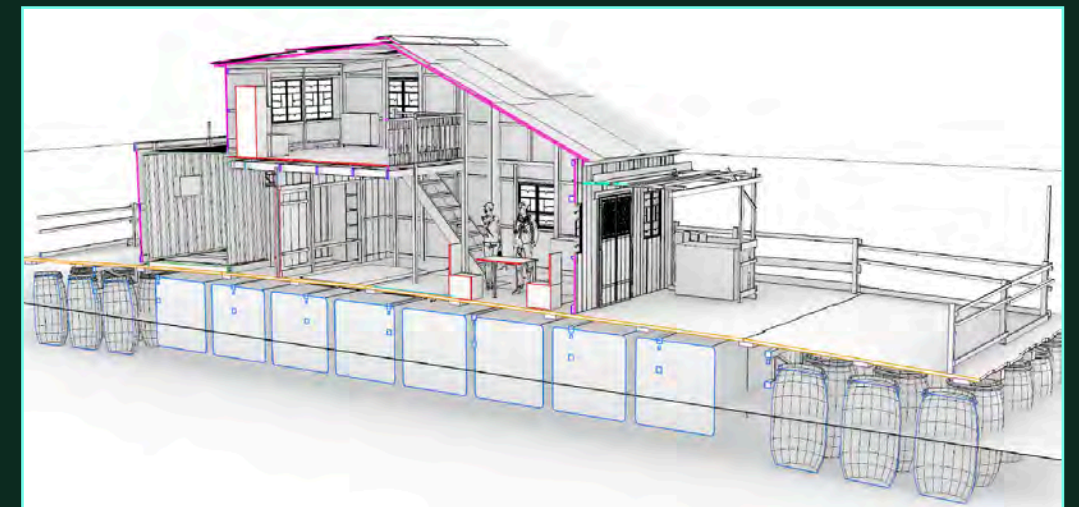
ILLUSTRATIONS - JH



LOCATION



FINISHES AND DRESSING DRAWING

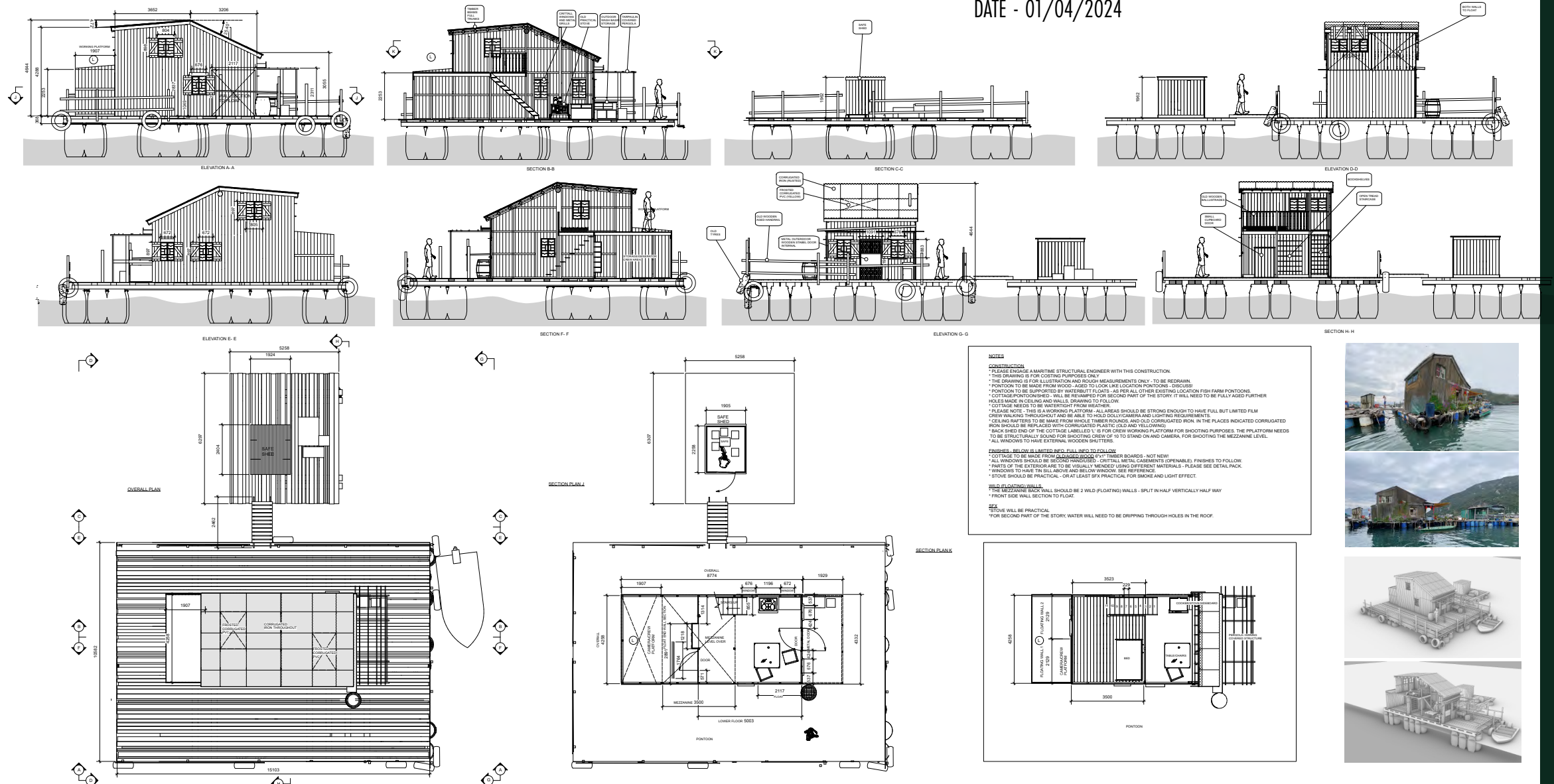


CONSTRUCTION DRAWING

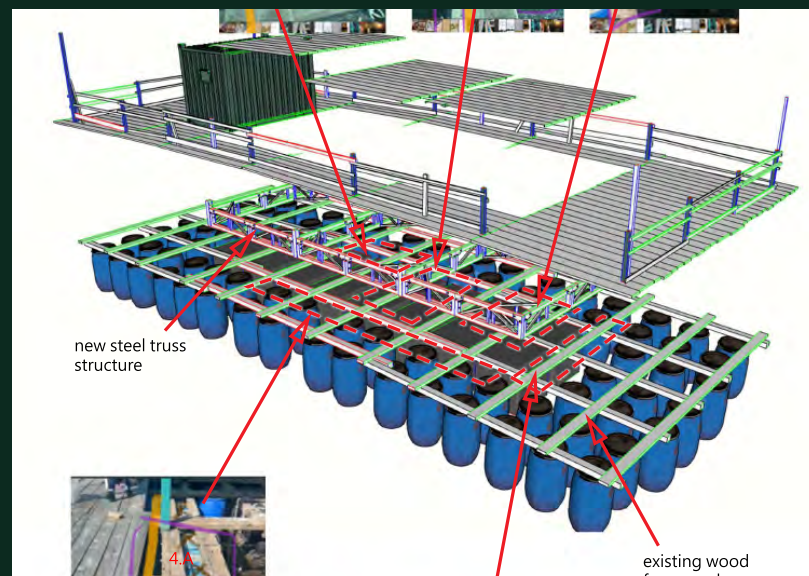
THE BALLAD OF A SMALL PLAYER - DAO MING'S COTTAGE - SECTION PLANS/ SECTIONS AND ELEVATIONS - SCALE 1:50

WIP - FOR COSTING PURPOSES ONLY - DO NOT BUILD

DATE - 01/04/2024



WIP CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS - JH



CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS - JL



MODEL



CONSTRUCTION PHOTO - JL











NIGHT OF THE HUNGRY GHOST





ILLUSTRATION - JH

PAPER DEITY SCHEDULE

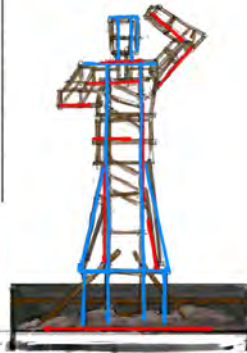
1. PAPER DEITY
& BAMBOO SCAFFOLD.



RESET

2. METAL STRUCTURE
WITH FLAME BAILS
AND BAMBOO PILES.

FLAME BAR
METAL SCAFFOLD.



2.1 DESS WITH FLAME
RETARDANT MATERIAL
(DISTRESSED & PAINTED)



3. CONTROLLED
BURNING.



JETTY ALTERNATIVE 1 - LOBSTER STRUCTURE

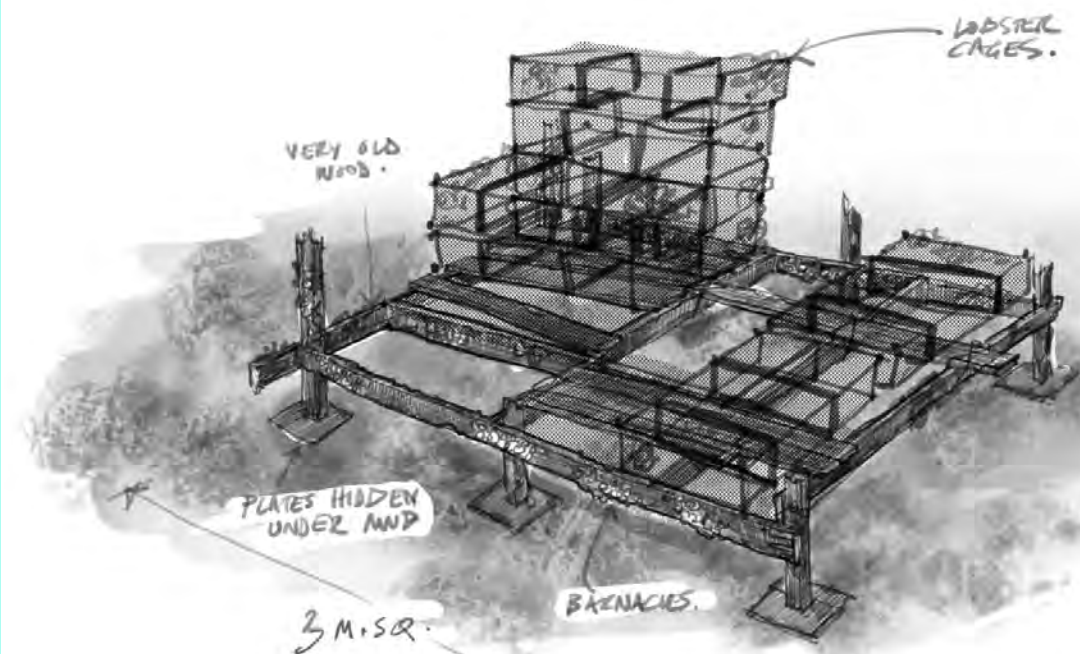
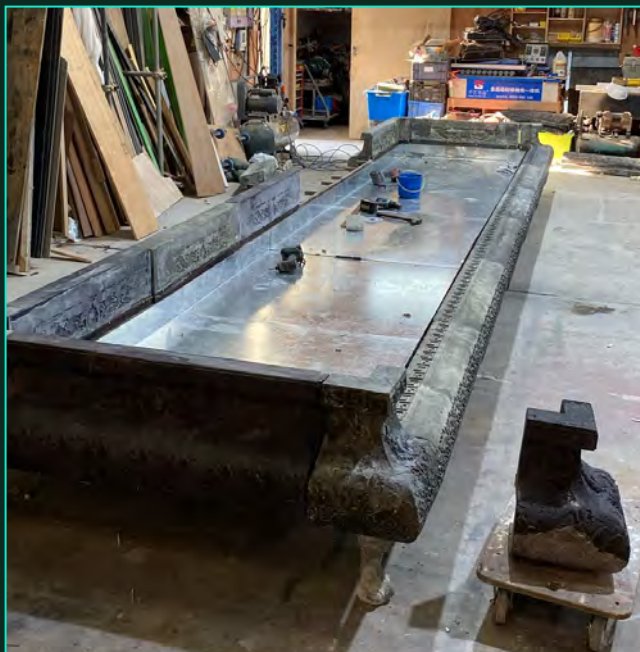








ILLUSTRATION - JH



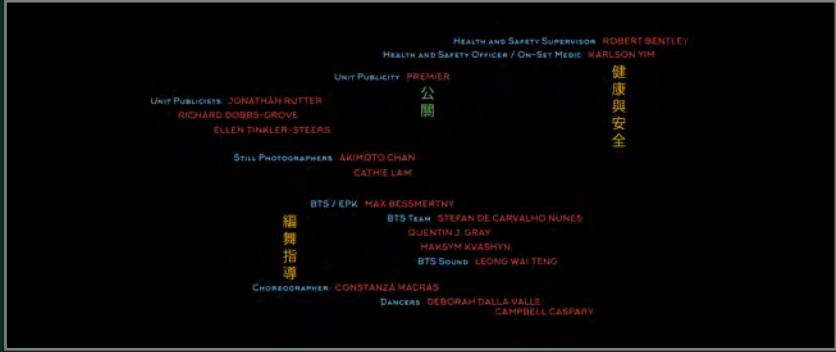
FIRE PIT CONSTRUCTION





TITLE SEQUENCE
BY NIC BENNS

The Macau-neon inspired credits flicker in letter by letter, while seamlessly connecting to each other as if ‘luck’ is passed between them. The end credits progressively unravel and are drawn into a maddening labyrinth, echoing the main character’s arc. Every card is a different puzzle.





THANK YOU