

The Art Director of Season 8: **LESLIE PARSONS** Shares Information about the Sets

Interview by

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I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Leslie Parsons through email to ask her some questions I had regarding her work as the show's art director in season 8 (1988-89). Leslie's answers are in bold print.

What comes to your mind when you think of *Falcon Crest*?

That was all a very long time ago, but I do remember this:

Although Mariska Hargitay was only there for the first couple of episodes, her screen presence and charisma were very obvious, even then.

Season 8, we did NOT go up to Napa for any first unit shooting. There was a big strike in the industry, including certain crafts and also transportation — so we couldn't go anywhere. Everything was done locally in L.A., which was a big change. We had to partially recreate the exterior of the *Mansion* on the lot (and then burn it down), and we had to build a new interior winery set, and also a bank interior, among other things. All of this had to be done in a very short time frame.



The interior of the new Tuscany Interstate Bank set that had to be built on short notice: scenes from episodes 187 <8.04> and 189 <8.06>.

The left screen capture shows the tellers' desk and the access to the vault. The right one shows the entrance to the bank manager's office (behind Pilar's desk).

Floor plans of this and other sets can be found in the members section of our website:
www.falconcrest.org – Show – Production Office – Filming Locations – Movie Studios – Interior Sets

Was the coat of arms on top of the exterior set of the *Victorian Mansion* that was specifically built for the fire scene the same prop as the one used on the main gate to *Falcon Crest*?



The main tower replica of the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion* built on the CBS backlot.

Attached is a photo of the 50-foot-high section of the *Mansion* we built on the backlot especially for the fire scene. You can see the *Falcon Crest* coat of arms weathervane on the top of the cupola. It was custom built for that set.



Left: The coat of arms on the cupola of the main tower replica.



Right: The coat of arm on the main gate to *Falcon Crest*.



Left and above: Scenes from episode 186 <8.03> with the burning set of the *Falcon Crest Victorian Mansion*: The existing set was used to create the fire and was reused in later episodes.

Right: The burning replica of the main tower. Note the gas pipes behind the balustrade to create the fire.



Left: Lance and Melissa are rescued from the burning *Victorian Mansion*.



Center: The main tower engulfed in flames.

Right: A picture from the CBS backlot taken while they filmed the fire scene.

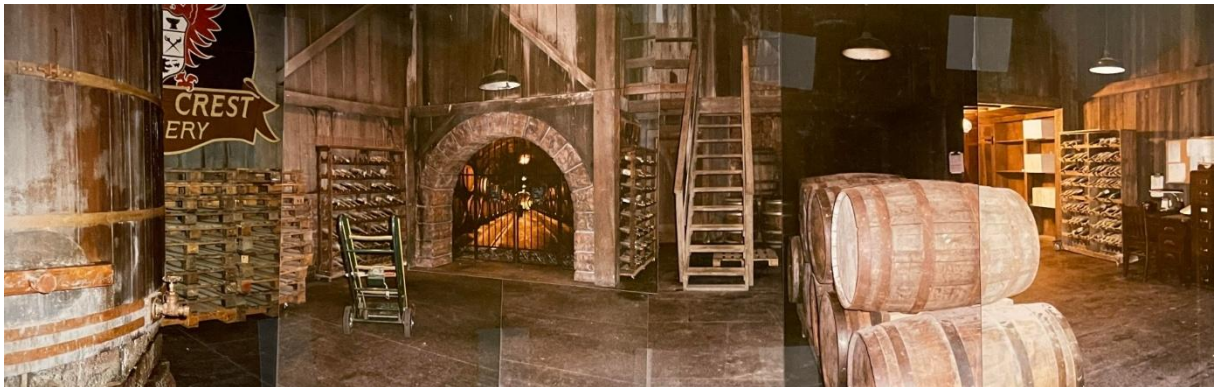


We have floor plans of the bank set you mentioned in your original reply but would be very curious to see the winery set floor plan — if you may still have them.

Sorry, I don't have any floor plans of the winery. I have attached a photo which you can use if you want.

Sorry the pictures are so bad; we would just pan and shoot and then run over to "One Hour Photo" to have the photos printed out and then tape them together to use as we needed. The variations in color from photo to photo are the fault of the photo processor. I tried to get the tape off, but it's been on there almost 40 years, and it won't come off.

Two notes about the set: My favorite part is the photo backing that you can see through the stone arch; wine barrels disappearing waaay down the tunnel. The other thing we did was go out and buy gallons of cheap red wine and pour it under the giant wine barrel (in the foreground on the left) and behind the walls of the winery set, so it smelled like the real wineries that we visited for research.



The "panoramic" picture of the *Falcon Crest Winery Building* set from season 8 and slightly redressed for season 9.

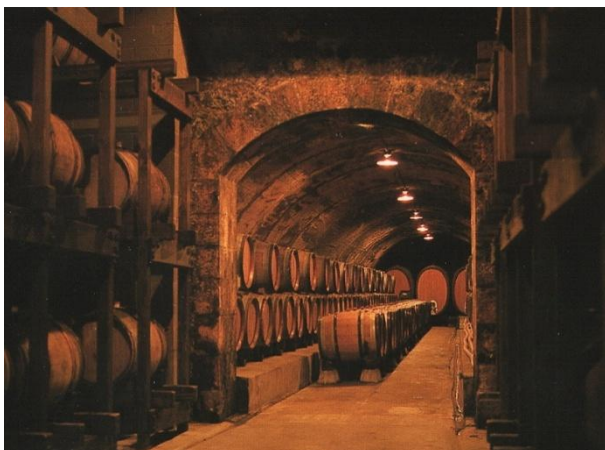
In the center left, the stone arch with the wine barrels disappearing into the cave can be seen.

This photo wallpaper shows the real interior of the winery building at *Spring Mountain Vineyards*.

Almost impossible to see (both in this photo as well as on film) are the falcon coat of arms on each door of the double gates to the cave.

The huge vat on the left was built for the set.

Below is a 1980's picture of the interior of *Spring Mountain Winery Building's* historic cave that was used for the photo wallpaper.



That is very interesting. None of us ever thought that you would create such a realistic atmosphere with the smell of the place on the set just for the actors since the smell was not something that could be transported on screen for the audience. Do you know where the huge vat and the other barrels came from?

The huge vat was custom-built for the winery set. The other barrels were purchased.

Were you ever near the set when filming was going on? If so, what was the experience like watching Jane Wyman, David Selby, Susan Sullivan, and others do their work in front of the camera?

No. The art director is not needed onstage when the shooting company is there. The art department is always out prepping (scouting locations, budgeting, designing sets, drafting, overseeing construction, painting, dressing, etc.) for the next episode while the current episode is being shot. It's a constant 'leapfrog' process.

Did you ever talk with Jane Wyman about your work? Was there anything she suggested for a set before a scene was shot?

No.

After the *Victorian Mansion* went up in flames in season 8 and was then rebuilt, you used the existing set, of course, but updated it. Interestingly enough, though, you added on a porch on the northern side of the *Mansion* (accessible from the dining room) which reflects the actual glass-covered patio of the real *Villa Miravalle* at *Spring Mountain*. Unfortunately, this new room was never used for any scene in season 8. In season 9, one scene for *Flesh and Blood* (episode 208 <9.03>) with Chao-Li and Emma was filmed in it, but it was deleted in post-production. Do you know why the room was never used in those days after it was built? It does seem odd that the studio would spend the money for a full room, and then never utilize it.

Sometimes things like that are an inexpensive way to get extra depth in the foreground set or are used to "break up" a painted backing. As far as your comment about spending the money on a room and then never using it — in an episodic show such as this, the "standing sets" are typically all built at the beginning of the season so that the cost of them can be amortized over the entire season. The list of sets that are asked for by the producers are their best guess for what will be needed in the future.



In a scene from episode 191 <8.08> the interior set of the glass covered patio or conservatory was "used": A waiter entered the patio (seen on the right).

Another change in the *Victorian Mansion* set in season 8 was that the multi-purpose bedroom set (the one that was constantly redressed as different bedrooms) with an L-shaped hallway around it was built right behind the living room, which changed the windows or French doors at the *Mansion's* rear to interior doors leading into hallways. In previous seasons, the bedroom set was a separate one. Why was that change made?

The answer to that question is not found in archaeology or anthropology, but in simple mathematics. Every shooting company costs X thousands of dollars per minute. (The value of X, of course, being unique for each show.) If you don't have

a bedroom set on the *Falcon Crest Mansion* stage, you have to dismantle that shooting company and move it elsewhere in order to shoot one of the many bedroom scenes, paying X thousands of dollars per minute every single time you have to do that.



While there was a big bay window from seasons 1 to 5 at the rear and a terrace with French doors to either side of the fireplace in season 6, a strange new hallway appeared in the *Mansion's* set from season 8 on, making the first floor of the *Victorian Mansion* much bigger.

Are you still active in art direction on current film or television projects?

No; I left the business in 2000.

Have you kept in contact with any of your co-workers from *Falcon Crest* since 1989? If so, who do you still speak with or see?

No.

Thank you for your time, Leslie. We understand you have moved on from *Falcon Crest*, but we are always seeking new insights and information for the series in our research. We enjoyed your reminiscences and do appreciate you for taking the time to answer these, our final few questions. It has been a pleasure speaking with you.

Thank you for your interest in my small part in the giant endeavor that was *Falcon Crest*.

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