Pinholes on the tables mark where thousands of landscape plans were laboried over, and where lead drafting “whales” weighted the wooden arcs formed to draw Olmsted’s meandering paths. Employees serving as “copiers” sat at a “light table,” tracing fine lines of a design on paper uptil, through glass, by metal lamps on the floor. The tracings became blueprints: drawings were placed atop paper treated with cyanide salts and rolled through windows onto racks outside to develop in the sun. Later, the 1904 Wagenhorst Electric Blue Printer, also on display, brought that process indoors.

By the time the federal government took over the site, business had dwindled for years and the firm had consolidated operations on the first floor. Some 135,000 paper plans were found in a storage vault, Swartz reports, most of them “dirty, stained, brittle, and torn,” he adds, “a few with mold growing on them.” It took paper conservators nearly 15 years to inventory and repair them. Altogether, more than a million archival documents are stored on site; researchers may work there by appointment.

The restoration work outside was and is just as carefully considered. The hollow to the right of the hemlock and carriageway in front of the house, for example, is maintained as “wild,” Swartz says. Olmsted eschewed flower gardens, preferring the picturesque landscape and a palate of greens. Here, visitors descend rock steps into the hollow to find his differentiated shades, textures, shapes, and sizes cool to the eye, and more soothing to walk through.

Fairsted is ultimately a manmade environment. “He cut down all the elms out here,” Swartz explains, “except the one he wanted, in the middle of the South Lawn.” That tree survived until 2011. Much discussion of historic and scholarly interpretations and practical realities (efforts to propagate cuttings from the original elm failed) led to replacing it in 2013 with a new, disease-resistant variety, the Jefferson elm. The young specimen stands alone on the lawn, cordoned off by ropes. “We’re protecting it,” says Swartz. The hope is that half a century from now, Olmsted’s visionary design will again offer the sense that nothing was placed here, that everything simply evolved.

**CURIOSITIES: Staging Magic**

In designing 106 costumes from scratch for the musical *Finding Neverland*, Suttirat Larlarb was challenged to depict Edwardian-era history with a fresh visual edge—and convey the explosive magic of the imagination. “You don’t want a museum piece set to music,” notes Larlarb, who was educated at Stanford and Yale. She has worked on numerous films (e.g., *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Trance*), and co-designed the 2012 Summer Olympics opening ceremony: recall the splendid “white-dove” cyclists? The ART’s world-premiere musical, based on the 2004 movie, has its own ceremony: recall the splendid “white-dove” cyclists? The ART’s world-premiere musical, based on the 2004 movie, has its own costume institute and a more recent design in *Vogue Italia.* Even Mary’s satin evening gown is an “urban,” orderly, navy blue, Larlarb says, whereas her husband’s muse, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, is a softer creature first seen playing in a park with her boys. She wears drapey, gauzy blouses and long skirts of pale oranges, pinks, and lavender—just “the right degree of bohemian hyperfemininity,” says Larlarb—and a peach-toned frock with an airy, flowery print at dinner. No matter how beautiful, the designer adds, costumes should not be signature artistic “concepts,” a word she dislikes. Instead, “they serve a larger ambition—the intended journey of the play.”

Thousands of swatches were sourced to find just the right Italian lace used in this gown for actress Jeanna de Waal (Mary Barrie). Too stiff to shimmy when she walks. (It was inspired by a 1901 dress at the Kyoto Costume Institute and a more recent design in *Vogue Italia.* Even Mary’s satin evening gown is an “urban,” orderly, navy blue, Larlarb says, whereas her husband’s muse, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, is a softer creature first seen playing in a park with her boys. She wears drapey, gauzy blouses and long skirts of pale oranges, pinks, and lavender—just “the right degree of bohemian hyperfemininity,” says Larlarb—and a peach-toned frock with an airy, flowery print at dinner. No matter how beautiful, the designer adds, costumes should not be signature artistic “concepts,” a word she dislikes. Instead, “they serve a larger ambition—the intended journey of the play.”

Finding Neverland
American Repertory Theater
Through September 28
http://americanrepertorytheater.org

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746

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