

Pride & Prejudice's costume studies

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By Morgan Mullin

Pride & Prejudice

Thursdays to Saturdays, March 16-April 8, 8pm Sunday March 26 and Sunday April 2 at 2pm

Pond Playhouse, 6 Parkhill Road

\$18

Costume designer Susan Hall has watched Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth walk in the garden so many times that, by now, she must have the engagement scene memorized. As the head of all things wardrobe for Theatre Arts Guild's upcoming *Pride & Prejudice*, which opens March 16, she delved into research a full year before the play's production began. She learned all about Jane Austen societies and watched "a lot of Jane Austen movies—the BBC did a lot of my research for me," she says, laughing.

The results of all that viewing? A close, cotton study in Victorian society that, while Hall hesitates to mark as absolutely historically correct—"We didn't wear down wood for buttons or spend years sewing dresses by hand!"—captures its time "based on historical detail, but in a theatrical way."

Here, she guides us through the details of one of her favourite looks.

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- Bruce Goodick

1 A hallmark of Austen-era dressing? Large, flat, fabric-covered buttons. To achieve the correct button shape, Hall and her crew had to get creative: "We had two wonderfully patient women who took a lot of time covering pennies [with fabric] that we used for buttons. So when you see these covered buttons on the men's waistcoats and things, they've all been covered by hand," Hall says.

2 In Victorian times, stockings were not the curve-chasing Lycra of today. Hall had the actors' ankles swathed in hand-sewn stockings to create a more realistic feel: "The stockings bag a bit around the ankle and have to be held up with a garter," she says. This means the act of dressing helps the actor transport themselves to the character's day.

3 "It's about creating the silhouette of an era," Hall explains. "That was a very erect time period, not like the slouch of today," she says. "So, I made the backs [on garments] a lot smaller, forcing the actors to stand up."