

it was all still so new and everything you did was inventive and hands on. Now we are all mouse-clickers and digital artists, which in itself is an art form. But physical creation, physical involvement, is a thing of the past in movies, unless you are working in production on set. Anyway, this is a great bio. I've always wanted to know more about this Menzies, what made him tick, what gave him drive, and Curtis has pretty much fleshed him out. What a genius! 15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. A pioneering book about a pioneer film stylist who production designed GONE WITH THE WIND. By Customer This is a book about an influential pioneer film stylist whose name isn't as well known as the films he helped to art direct - the technique of production design. The most famous of these was the GONE WITH THE WIND (Selznick 1939) and it was William Cameron Menzies who made that film into an early example of a movie experience by adding color visual techniques that gave audiences the feeling of grandeur in a way that other films couldn't match, particularly during the pre-1953 period before films were made in widescreen. Much of this was combined with special effects. His trademark look often involved montage, or tracking shots - often using actors in silhouette against dawn or dusk, fire or storm. This book is the first full length account of his life and of the films to which he added his considerable talents. When you watch these films today it becomes clear that modern film directors have seen them, and not only that have emulated his style.

He was the consummate designer of film architecture on a grand scale, influenced by German expressionism and the work of the great European directors. He was known for his visual flair and timeless innovation, a man who meticulously preplanned the color and design of each film through a series of continuity sketches that made clear camera angles, lighting, and the actors positions for each scene, translating dramatic conventions of the stage to the new capabilities of film. Here is the long-awaited book on William Cameron Menzies, Hollywood's first and greatest production designer, a job title David O. Selznick invented for Menzies extraordinary, all-encompassing, Academy Award-winning work on *Gone With the Wind* (which he effectively co-directed). It was Menzies winner of the first-ever Academy Award for Art Direction, jointly for *The Dove* (1927) and *Tempest* (1928), and who was as well a director (fourteen pictures) and a producer (twelve pictures) who changed the way movies were (and still are) made, in a career that spanned four decades, from the 1920s through the 1950s. His more than 120 films include *Rosita* (1923), *Things to Come* (1936), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Kings Row* (1942), *Mr. Lucky* (1943), *The Pride of the Yankees* (1943), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943), *Address Unknown* (1944), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Invaders from Mars* (1953), and *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956). Now, James Curtis, acclaimed film historian and biographer, writes of Menzies life and work as the most influential designer in the history of film. His artistry encompassed the large, scenic drawings of Douglas Fairbanks *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), which created a new standard for beauty on the screen and whose exotic fairy-tale sets are still regarded as pure genius. (I saw *The Thief of Bagdad* when it first came out, said Orson Welles he was, at the time, a nine-year-old boy. Ill never forget it.) Curtis writes of Menzies design and supervision of John Barrymore's *Beloved Rogue* (1927), a film that remains a masterpiece of craft and synthesis, one of the most distinctive pictures to emerge from Hollywood's waning days of silent films, and of his extraordinary, opulent appointments for *Gone With the Wind* (1939). It was Menzies who defined and solidified the role of art director as having overall control of the look of the motion picture, collaborating with producers like David O. Selznick and Samuel Goldwyn; with directors such as D. W. Griffith, Raoul Walsh, Alfred Hitchcock, Lewis Milestone, and Frank Capra. And with actors as varied as Ingrid Bergman, W. C. Fields, Cary Grant, Clark Gable, John Barrymore, Barbara Stanwyck, Ronald Reagan, Gary Cooper, Vivien Leigh, Carole Lombard, Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, and David Niven. Interviewing colleagues, actors, directors, friends, and family, and with full access to the William Cameron Menzies family collection of original artwork, correspondence, scrapbooks, and unpublished writing, Curtis brilliantly gives us the path-finding work of the movies most daring and dynamic production designer: his evolution as artist, art director, production designer, and director. Here is a portrait of a man in his time that makes clear how the movies were forever transformed by his startling, visionary work. (With 16 pages of color illustrations, and black-and-white photographs throughout.)

Cheers for James Curtiss WILLIAM CAMERON MENZIES A book that demanded to be written . . . How fortunate for us that James Curtis took on the job of chronicling Menzies life and work . . . Curtis offers a solid narrative that should captivate any true film buff . . . Superb . . . Well-written, meticulously researched . . . Lives up to, and even exceeds, my expectations . . . An essential addition to any film library and a great read. Bravo! Leonard Maltin, *Indiewire* Wonderful . . . a meticulously researched and long-overdue biography . . . The authors deep admiration and respect for his subject permeate this book and provide its glow. Emily Leider, *The Wall Street Journal* "James Curtis's magnificent biography of William Cameron Menzies (an authentic genius in an industry that boasted so many fake ones) is at once the history of the invention of the modern movie business, from the transition of silents to sound and on to the full-blown megapictures like *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and to the TV business, and at the same time a brilliant, detailed and touching biography of a man who should be much better known than he is. He flickers in and out of the Korda family's films, and I remember him well. He has found in James Curtis just the biographer he would have wanted, flinty, accurate and at the same time sympathetic. This is a book that goes far beyond the film buff--it is

an important life wonderfully told." Michael Korda, author of *Charmed Lives* and *Queenie* A wonderful book about visionary production designer William Cameron Menzies, an unsung hero if there ever was one and yet an artist of almost unparalleled influence . . . Scrupulously researched, detailed, all-encompassing . . . its many delights include lavish, beautiful illustrations of Menzies' sketches as well as photographs of actual films. A whole new world about production design and American movies will open up for those who read this excellent book." Andre Bishop, Artistic Director of Lincoln Center Theater An important and informative biography that, like its subject, breaks new ground in its field. Essential for film historians and highly recommended for fans of performing arts biographies. Neil Dirksen, *Library Journal* Wonderful . . . Curtis fills in all the missing pieces . . . an illuminating, long-overdue book about the man who taught the world how to make a good film. Kirkus For anyone seriously interested in filmmaking, this is a book you've been waiting for, whether you know it or not. William Cameron Menzies, the man who more or less invented the idea of production design in movies, casts a very long shadow. The man behind *Gone with the Wind*, *Kings Row*, *Our Town*, *Things to Come*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Reign of Terror*, both versions of *The Thief of Bagdad* and many, many other films was a genius, pure and simple, and his influence was incalculable. James Curtiss informative and beautifully written book does a thorough job of bringing Menzies to life. Martin Scorsese About the Author JAMES CURTIS is the author of *Spencer Tracy: A Biography*, *W. C. Fields: A Biography* (winner of the 2004 Theatre Library Association Award, Special Jury Prize), *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters*, and *Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges*. Curtis is married and lives in Brea, California. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. In the year 1963, Alfred Hitchcock was questioned by an earnest young interviewer who said that he presumed that all of Hitchcock's films were pre-designed by an art director. Did he, in fact, do all the drawings himself? Well, said Hitchcock, art director is not a correct term. You see, an art director, as we know it in the studios, is a man who designs a set. The art director seems to leave the set before it's dressed and a new man comes on the set called the set dresser. Now, there is another function which goes a little further beyond the art director and is almost in a different realm. That is the production designer. Now, a production designer is a man usually who designs angles and sometimes production ideas. Treatment of action. There used to be a man . . . is he still alive? William Cameron Menzies. No, he's not. Well, I had William Cameron Menzies on a picture called *Foreign Correspondent* and he would take a sequence, you see, and by a series of sketches indicate camera setups. Now this is, in a way, nothing to do with art direction. The art director is set designing. Production design is definitely taking a sequence and laying it out in sketches. With the completion of *Rebecca*, Selznick closed his studio for an extended period, ultimately liquidating Selznick International in order to draw down the substantial profits generated by *Gone With the Wind*. He began selling off the properties he owned *The Keys of the Kingdom* and *Claudia*, among others and loaning his contract talent to other producers. Vivien Leigh and Ingrid Bergman were sent to M-G-M while his one director, Hitchcock, was lent to producer Walter Wanger. The deal with Wanger was concluded on October 2, 1939, establishing Hitchcock as the director of Vincent Sheean's memoir *Personal History*, a property that had been under development since 1935. Considering the book dated and unsuited to his particular strengths as a storyteller, Hitchcock, in collaboration with his wife, Alma Reville, and his secretary, Joan Harrison, devised an entirely new plotline which carried Sheean's title from the book and little else. Eventually, the title, too, would be dropped, the film instead drawing its name from Sheean's longtime profession *Foreign Correspondent*. By the time Menzies came aboard in March, reportedly at Hitchcock's behest, a total of twenty-two writers had contributed to the script, including John Howard Lawson, Budd Schulberg, John Meehan, James Hilton, Ben Hecht, and Robert Benchley. Indeed, Selznick may have had a hand in putting the two men together, as Hitchcock had never before tackled a picture as big or as complex. Selznick was also keen to establish a demand for his British import, whose last released picture in the United States was *Jamaica Inn*. Menzies found that Hitchcock, himself a former art director, was in the habit of making rough pencil sketches on his copy of the script. Menzies, in turn, worked out more than a hundred oversized drawings of sets and action for the start of production, as well as models of a dozen sets. When shooting began on March 18, 1940, the film was already four months behind schedule and progress was, at times, agonizingly slow. Menzies later recalled a rather unpleasant association with Hitch that nevertheless yielded some pretty good results. Among the principal sequences was a plane crash staged in the same manner as the dirigible crash in *The Lottery Bride*. I hardly used any miniatures at all, said Menzies, but did the whole thing objectively, that is from a point of view always inside the cabin. I also had a very interesting sequence in a windmill where we really got some good photographic effects, and an assassination sequence in Amsterdam in the rain, which I rather borrowed from *Our Town*. The huddle of black umbrellas to represent Emily's funeral cortege was a memorable feature of Jed Harris' original stage production, and Menzies had elaborated on it, gathering the canopies, glistening in the rainfall, in the foreground of the shot and allowing the night sky to fully occupy the upper half of the frame. There had never been a more spiritual composition for the talking screen, and now Menzies took the same basic elements, expanded their numbers exponentially to fill a public square, and clustered them to emphasize the particularly brazen murder of a Dutch diplomat, an event that sends John Jones in pursuit of the killer, an adventure similar in substance and pacing to the director's earlier *39 Steps*. The windmill scenes were shot during the first days of production and afforded a kinetic maze of hazards and hiding places, the actors confined to a claustrophobic tangle of stairways and gears, the protagonist (Joel McCrea) eluding

Nazi agents while attempting to rescue the drugged and disoriented Van Meer, whose memory holds the critical clause of an allied peace treaty. Menzies estimated he made about 200 drawings for *Foreign Correspondent*, roughly a quarter of the number he typically did for a feature, implying he worked primarily on the film's complex set pieces. It was my observation, said actress Laraine Day, that Mr. Hitchcock and Mr. Menzies conferred on every shot that had been drawn by Mr. Menzies. Whether or not there was a storyboard for the entire production, I don't really know, but it would seem reasonable to believe that if every scene was drawn before it was filmed, there must have been a storyboard from which these individual scene depictions were taken for them to discuss. Their working relationship during *Foreign Correspondent* seemed very close. The crash, much more elaborate in design and execution than its 1930 predecessor, formed the basis for the climax of the picture. And unlike the dirigible crash in *Lottery Bride*, which took place in frozen environs of the Arctic Circle, the downing of the clipper in *Foreign Correspondent* takes place over the ocean. The whole thing was done in a single shot without a cut! marveled Hitchcock in his marathon 1962 interview with François Truffaut. I had a transparency screen made of paper, and behind that screen, a water tank. The plane dived, and as soon as the water got close to it, I pressed the button and the water burst through, tearing the screen away. The volume was so great that you never saw the screen. The teaming of Alfred Hitchcock and William Cameron Menzies proved an inspired melding of two vastly different artistic sensibilities, Hitchcock being interested in the conveyance of visual information, Menzies in the deepening of the film's graphic impact. Together, they produced one of the grand thrillers of the sound era. When production closed on May 29, 1940, after sixty-five days of shooting and eleven days of retakes, the negative cost of *Foreign Correspondent* stood at \$1,484,167 by far the most expensive picture Hitchcock had ever made.