In the contemporary advertisements for *Rear Window*, the set looms large above the actors as the most prominent feature. In the publicity releases Paramount sent to the press, a description and history of the set is featured second only to a blurb about Hitchcock. In the black-and-white trailers made especially for television, there are no actors at all, only a slow pan around the courtyard set, accompanied by voice-over narration. In many ways, then, the fabulous set built for *Rear Window* is the “star” of the film, even more central to its success than James Stewart or Grace Kelly. It certainly cost more than the actors: Designing, constructing, dressing, and lighting the set accounted for over 25 percent of the total cost of the picture, compared to 12 percent for the cast.¹ Robert Burks, *Rear Window*’s director of photography, did not exaggerate when he called the undertaking the biggest production on a Paramount lot since the days of Cecil B. DeMille.²

Given the significance of the set for the film, it is only fitting that this chapter reflect that importance by providing an “architectural” history of the project. The following, therefore, is something of a backstage tour of the production, an inspection of the nuts and bolts, the girders and planks with which *Rear Window* was “built.” This chapter describes the evolution of the production from the ground up: the acquisition of the property that provided its foundation, the design of the film, the construction of the set, the principal photography, the final touches, and the window dressing. By retracing the construction of *Rear Window*, we
can create a “blueprint” of the film that will provide insight into the structure of this and other Hitchcock productions as well as the principles behind the production of Hollywood studio films in general.

It would be wholly appropriate, too, if this “blueprint” somehow mirrored the film’s themes and design; it has become a critical commonplace that Rear Window is among the most reflexive of all films. If, as John Belton maintains, “the film is engaged in a playful acknowledgment of its own constructedness,” then we can examine the film and its production history as an allegory of the construction of meaning. From the original story that provides the “plot” upon which the film is built, to the narratively meaningful set design and photography, to the subsequent publicity campaign’s slight “remodeling” of the story, each stage of the film’s construction echoes the interpretive work of both Jefferies and the spectator.

THE PROPERTY

How did Hitchcock come across this “property,” this “plot” upon which he could “build to suit”? That is, how did he come to make a film of Cornell Woolrich’s short story, “Rear Window”? One might guess that he read the story, liked it, and decided to buy it. Actually – and this is more indicative of the way deals are usually made in Hollywood – a string of agents and executives led him to material that fit his needs at the time. The paper trail begins in February 1942, when Dime Detective Magazine published a short story by Woolrich, writing as William Irish, titled “It Had to Be Murder.” In 1944 Woolrich gathered this story – renaming it “Rear Window” – and five others in an anthology titled After-Dinner Story. The publisher, J. B. Lippincott, submitted the anthology to Paramount Pictures (and to many other studios, we can be sure) that same year and a studio reader dutifully provided a summary of the story’s salient features and general adaptability, which was subsequently filed for posterity.

H. N. Swanson, Woolrich’s literary agent, sold the film rights to the stories in After-Dinner Story to B. G. De Sylva Productions for $9,250 in 1945. Buddy De Sylva, a well-known stage and film producer, made his fortune by buying and selling rights to musical and literary properties. When he died in 1950, his rights to the anthology went up for auction and Leland Hayward, a stage producer and talent agent, along with Joshua Logan, a Broadway playwright and director, bought them up for a pittance. Logan wrote a treatment of “Rear Window” in February 1952. According to Logan, he and Hayward planned to produce “Rear Window” as a “trial balloon” in order to test studio and audience reaction to his film-directing skills before attempting to direct his Broadway hit, Mister Roberts, for the big screen. (Up to that point, Logan had little feature filmmaking experience.) But this plan was eventually scuttled; in April 1953 Hayward sent Logan’s treatment to Lew Wasserman, Hitchcock’s agent at MCA in New York.

At this time, Hitchcock was preparing his latest film for Warner Bros., Dial M for Murder, while Wasserman negotiated for him a multipicture contract with Paramount. Wasserman forwarded the treatment to Hitchcock, undoubtedly thinking that it would make suitable material for the first of these pictures. James Stewart was a part of the plan from the beginning; following Rope (1948), he and Hitchcock planned to make another film together and as early as May 1953 they are named, along with Hayward and Logan, as producers of this new film. The situation was very cozy: Not only were Stewart and Logan old friends and classmates at Princeton (and members of Princeton’s University Players in the early 1930s), but Hitchcock, Stewart, and Logan all shared the same agent – Lew Wasserman.

This might also explain the sweet deal Hayward and Logan received for their efforts: Some time between May and November 1953, Patron, Inc., the production company formed by Hitchcock and Stewart, bought the story rights from Hayward and Logan for $10,000. In addition, Logan received a tidy $15,000 for his thirteen-page treatment. The deal may have been even sweeter. According to the budget sheets, the $10,000 covered only a portion of the story rights; the balance was to be paid from the film’s rev-
venues. An outline titled "Legal Notes Relative to Haygan [Hayward-Logan] Incorporated - 'Rear Window,'" states, "The services of the producer, director, James Stewart, including the services of Haygan's attorney, will not exceed $200,000; all of which will be deferred and payable out of the gross receipts of the photoplay. . . . Allow $10,000 in budget for Story Rights. Balance of Story Rights are to be recouped from $200,000 deferred charge." In other words, Hitchcock, Stewart, and Haygan were paid out of this $200,000 slice of the revenues. The outline also implies that Haygan is the production company, but Patron, Inc. is listed as the production company on the Paramount budgets, the earliest of which is dated October 8, 1953. So while Hayward and Logan were not the final producers of record, they might have received further considerations after the film's release. Stewart and Hitchcock remained sole owners of the film; they received an initial payment for their services from the $200,000 mentioned here, but retained rights to the film's future profits, after Paramount's eight-year license. Stewart, by the way, was one of the first actors in Hollywood to defer his salary for a percentage of the film's profits, a practice that is commonplace today.

Hitchcock had his contract with Paramount by June 1953 and clearly planned to make Rear Window as his first Paramount film. During the next few months, however, he was busy with Dial M for Murder, which was to be shot in the new 3-D process; principal photography began August 5 and ended September 25. Hitchcock did some preproduction planning for Rear Window while shooting Dial M, but it was only toward the end of September that he could devote all his time to the Paramount project. Grace Kelly, the star of Dial M, remembered that, during the frustrations of filming in 3-D, "the only reason he could remain calm was because he was already preparing for his next picture, Rear Window. He sat and talked to me about it all the time, even before we had discussed my being in it. He was very enthusiastic as he described all the details of a fabulous set while we were waiting for the camera to be pushed around."

The screenwriter, John Michael Hayes, also came to the project via Hitchcock's agents. Hayes recalls, "We had the same agents at MCA, and they thought that my radio background in comedy and suspense might make me acceptable to him. He already owned the Woolrich short story and they suggested I work with him on it." Hayes also explains, "I first met Alfred Hitchcock on the set of Dial M for Murder. We had a story conference in which we discussed generally the outline we were going to use and what we had to add to it." While Logan might have broken ground first on Woolrich's property, the construction began in earnest as Hayes finished a seventy-six-page treatment of the story in early September 1953. With this in hand, Paramount could budget the film and Hitchcock could begin its design once principal photography for Dial M was complete.

PREPRODUCTION

If writing the treatment can be likened to clearing and surveying the "plot," a film's unique design begins to take shape only with the storyboard, art direction, and final script. Once the property is secured, however, budgeting is the next step in the process. As a rule, accountants at the studios divide any given film's costs into approximately thirty general categories, which correspond to the studio's various departments (wardrobe, set construction, etc.). (See examples at the end of this chapter.) These categories are arranged on the budget sheet according to their place in a production's evolution, from story to sound recording. Costs are estimated based upon a treatment or, preferably, a finished screenplay. The story department makes multiple copies of the property and sends them to the departments, each of which returns its cost estimate of the work necessary to produce it. If the first budget is based upon a treatment, then the process begins again when the finished screenplay arrives.

In this particular case, budgeting began as soon as MCA sent Hayes's treatment to Paramount on September 11. The Paramount accountants prepared a preliminary budget by October 8, but as Hayes turned in completed pages of the screenplay, the
budgeting continued through principal photography, ending with the November 30 budget. The difference between the estimates could be considerable. For example, the “Lighting” estimate ballooned from $15,726 on the October 8 budget to $65,000 on the November 30 tally. The decision to “prelight” each apartment on the set contributed to this huge increase. The total budget went from $598,000 at the beginning of October to $875,000 at the start of shooting. However, the principal players (other than Stewart) had not signed as of October 8, so their cost alone contributed over $93,000 of that budget increase; clearly, these additions were expected and not unusual.24

As the budgeting process rolled along, Hitchcock began work on the visual design of the film, creating a cinematic story out of the plot Hayes's treatment provided. Hayes recalls:

When he finished Dial M for Murder we went to his office at Paramount and sat down with the script. We went over it line by line and page by page. What we did then was try to break it up into shots. Now Hitch wanted to set them up into actual camera angles. He had a large sketch pad on which he sketched out each camera set-up for each scene. . . . He didn’t wait until he got onto the set. He had the whole thing done when we finished working on the script in his office. He put the sketches in a large book. The camera men and the assistant directors looked at the sketches and Hitch told them what he wanted done.25

The use of a storyboard was typical of Hitchcock's working method, but not typical of Hollywood studio practice. While more meticulous directors – notably Orson Welles and Fred Zinnemann – would often sketch out certain scenes in their films, the use of a storyboard for an entire film was relatively rare in Hollywood film making outside of animated features and special cases such as Gone with the Wind.26 Hitchcock's experience as an art director in the 1920s undoubtedly contributed to his habit of sketching out the shots of all his films beforehand. (Skilled draftsman though he was, he usually had a graphic artist turn his sketches into more substantial storyboard images.) He often said that his delight in film making came from inventing the visual aspects of a film: “I

wish I didn’t have to shoot the picture. When I’ve gone through the script and created the picture on paper, for me the creative job is done and the rest is just a bore.”27

With a preliminary storyboard in place, hung on the walls of his office, important members of his crew discussed the production design in greater detail. John Woodcock, the assistant editor assigned to the film, remembers these meetings:

My introduction to our famous producer/director came at a preproduction meeting in his office, which was also attended by Bob Burks (director of photography), Lenny South (camera operator) and a man who turned out to be a graphic artist. . . . [My immediate attention was attracted to what seemed like cartoon panels covering three walls of the large room. It turned out to be a storyboard – the first that I had ever seen – in which every scene in the picture was portrayed by simple sketches that indicated the camera angle and action. . . . It was kept up to date and changed to reflect any changes in the actual shooting and was used to great effect in Rear Window.28

That even the editors were at the meeting illustrates the importance of the storyboards for the entire production. Editors for most studio productions were not usually involved until the post-production phase, after principal photography was complete. Hitchcock brought George Tomasini, the supervising editor, and Woodcock along because they were expected to cut the film as the storyboard dictated. “Thank God for the storyboard,” Woodcock says, “we even had a copy to assist in the editing.”29 The film therefore came to the editors “precut”: The order of the shots had already been determined even before shooting began. The storyboard, then, not only was one of the first stages in the construction of meaning – in the sense that camera angles and editing choices were first given their narrative significance here – but also served as the primary means by which Hitchcock articulated and maintained his authorial voice.

Hitchcock had a hand in the art direction, too. Although Hal Periera, the head of Paramount’s art department, acted in a general supervisory capacity and received top credit, Joseph MacMillan
“Mac” Johnson actually designed the set and supervised its construction. While Hayes retreated to finish the screenplay, Hitchcock, Johnson, and Periera began to sketch the set from the storyboards. It was clear from the beginning that the nature of the film required a studio set, rather than location shooting; to take over an actual apartment complex for two months and attempt to control the elements was simply out of the question. Besides, the confinement of Rear Window to a single studio set mirrored Jeff’s own confinement to his apartment and offered Hitchcock the sort of challenge he clearly enjoyed. (Compare, for example, similar restrictions in Lifeboat, Dial M, or Rope.) It also presented a challenge to the production designers: how to express the themes of the entire film through a single set?

John Belton argues that Jeff’s immobility determines the structure of the set and narrative. For example, the decision to limit the action to a single setting meant that narrative tangents, or subplots, had to be limited to this setting as well and therefore built into the stage design. The film does not cut away to events across town because all of the necessary elements have been built into the set. Jeff need look no further than his own backyard for a story. Furthermore, the film’s central theme of spectatorship is expressed through this design: The set has been built from Jeff’s point of view, or as Belton puts it, “The set has been built for the camera and for the cinema spectator, placing them at its central station point.” That Jeff’s apartment acted as the center of operations during principal photography – all lighting, sound, and camera work was controlled from this point, as we shall see – only reinforces the idea that “the set design reproduces the conditions of spectatorship in the conventional movie theater.” Immobile and voyeuristic, Jeff is watching several different movies at once – the designers even matched the size of the windows to different screen aspect ratios.  

If his neighbors are somehow unified by Jeff’s point of view, they are still physically and emotionally isolated from him and each other. Even though they share a common space – the courtyard – it is just as fragmented and inviolate as the apartments; its maze of different levels and fences discourages anyone from entering another’s area. (Contrast this situation to that in a Jean Renoir film, such as The Crime of Monsieur Lange, in which the courtyard is an emblem of community.) Likewise, Thorwald’s apartment, with its wall separating the salesman from his wife, emphasizes the couple’s estrangement. The set design, then, expresses the theme of isolation and alienation that runs throughout the film.

While designing the set to fit narrative demands, Hitchcock and Johnson were also concerned with realism. Toward the end of September, they sent C. O. “Doc” Erickson, the unit production manager for the film, to New York to obtain photographs of typical Greenwich Village courtyards. After making some preliminary sketches early in the process, Johnson sent photos of the drawings to Erickson with explicit instructions: “Find a rear court of this type of vista (sky and buildings in the background). This vista has to be north. . . . Take courtyard and vista in all its moods, dawn,
morning, noon, afternoon, last rays of sunlight on B. G. [background] buildings, dusk and night. . . . Shoot at least three different courts. Also shoot random color shots rear courtyards in the Village, for detail of color of buildings, any time of day. I will use these in painting the set."31 These photographs helped Johnson pin down the details for his final sketches and helped Burks plan the huge task of lighting the entire set.

Construction of the set began on October 12 and was substantially complete by the time they started camera tests on November 13.32 Built on Paramount's Stage 18, "the colossal set was 98 feet wide, 185 feet long, and 40 feet high, with structures rising five and six stories. . . . There were 31 apartments with most of the action occurring in eight completely furnished rooms, besides a labyrinth of fire escapes, roof-gardens, an alley, a street, and a skyline."33 The production notes from the studio publicity department claim that all the apartments in the building directly across from Jeff's had running water, electricity, and proper supporting from steel girders, so that they were actually habitable, though this might be a bit of hyperbole. They also claimed that "for the courtyard, laborers dug 30 feet below the stage level; so far, in fact, they struck water. This was determined when Harry Lindgren, the sound mixer, reported a strange noise creeping into the dialogue. When it was traced to running water, a small electric motor had to be installed to pump out the sump between camera takes."34 The construction cost alone amounted to $72,505, with designing, dressing, operation and maintenance, and other related costs bringing the total to $192,087, which made it the single most expensive aspect of the entire production.35 (See the list of production costs at the end of this chapter.)

Lighting the set turned into a daunting and expensive task. Paramount publicity trumpeted, "More than 1,000 giant arc-lights were needed to light the set from overhead, while more than 2,000 smaller variety of lamps were necessary for supplemental lighting."36 Their figures might not be exact, but they do give a sense of the scale of the project. Burks himself declared, "Actually, lighting this composite set was the biggest electrical job ever undertaken on the lot by Paramount – not excepting even Cecil B. DeMille's big spectacle sets. Biggest, that is, in terms of number of electrical units used, amps used, and the number of individual light units and amount of cable laid. At one time, we had every switch on the lot in use on the sound stage."37 The total cost of the lighting, including rentals, rigging, and operation (which would include the electric bill), came to $95,584.

Even so, it was less expensive than it might have been. Normally, electrical crews set up and strike lighting schemes for each shot, but given the size of the set and the several different points of action in any given shot of the courtyard, this procedure would have added days and dollars to the shooting schedule. Burks decided to "prelight" the set: "I went on the sound stage about ten days prior to the starting date. Using a skeleton crew, we pre-lit every one of the 31 apartments for both day and night, as well as lit the exterior of the courtyard for the dual-type illumination required. A remote switch controlled the lights in each apartment. On the stage, we had a switching set-up that looked like the console of the biggest organ ever made!"38 As they were rigging the lights, Burks and his crew created a chart detailing the lighting plan for each room and indicating the switches to be thrown for any given lighting arrangement. So for a shot that included, for example, both Miss Lonely Hearts and Thorwald's apartments, Burks merely looked at his chart and flipped a few switches to turn on the necessary lights. While the lighting arrangements did require adjustments during principal photography, prelighting saved an enormous amount of time in the long run. A change in the set lighting from night to day required only 45 minutes or so.39

While Johnson and Burks constructed and lit the set, Hitchcock and Paramount worked to gather a cast. Stewart, of course, was on board from the beginning. Grace Kelly, with whom Hitchcock had first worked during Dial M, had always been his first choice for Lisa. Wendell Corey already had a contract with Paramount and fit nicely into the role of Detective Thomas J. Doyle. Hitchcock acquired Thelma Ritter from 20th Century-Fox, and even though she received fourth billing, she was the highest paid cast member,
garnering $25,694 for her work. Raymond Burr, who at this point in his career made a good living playing heavies (and, as John Belton notes, bears a remarkable resemblance in this film to another Hitchcock bad guy, producer David O. Selznick), brought home $8,541. By prior agreement, Paramount paid the salaries of the bit players and extras only; Patron, Inc. picked up the tab for the speaking parts.

Meanwhile, Hayes was busy completing sections of the script. He began turning in pages on October 20 and delivered steadily until he finished at the end of November. Even though principal photography began on November 27 without a completed screenplay, Hayes delivered a final draft within a few days of the start date. Studio policy required that the Breen Office of the Motion Picture Association of America, which enforced the studio-sponsored Production Code, approve the script before shooting began. Paramount sent the incomplete version of the October 20 script to Joseph Breen; his office responded by November 20, objecting mostly to the sexual suggestiveness and voyeuristic quality of the screenplay. Concerning Miss Torso, for example, Breen wrote, "The picturization of a young girl, described as wearing only black panties, is unacceptable. It is apparent that she is nude above the waist, and it is only by the most judicious selection of camera angles that her nudity is concealed from the audience. We feel that this gives the entire action a flavor of a peep show, which is unacceptable." Of course, this was the exact flaw Hitchcock hoped to provoke and so he ignored most of their objections. But it was eventually the set design itself - not any changes in the script - that saved the film from the wrath of the Breen office.

**PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY**

The production opened on November 27 with a visit from a delegation from the Breen office. In response to Breen's objections to the script, Luigi Luraschi, the Paramount liaison to the MPAA, suggested that the Production Code staff meet with Hitchcock on the set. Luraschi and Hitchcock therefore anticipated Jeff's invitation to Detective Doyle: "It's just something I can't tell you over the telephone. You have to be here and see the whole setup." The set design was so crucial to understanding the narrative that the Breen Office, like Doyle, had to make a special trip from "downtown." Such trips were rare and initiated always by the studio, never by the Office itself, which normally based its judgments on the script alone. But according to the memo from the delegation:

[Luraschi] felt that some of the apprehension we had concerning stage directions would be eliminated, were we to see the physical set-up under which this action would be photographed. We readily agreed that the camera location, and the nature of this rather extraordinary set, eliminated much of the concern we felt in reading the script material. It is to be noted that the entire action will be photographed from a viewpoint of a man sitting in a wheelchair, looking out the window of his apartment. Many of the incidents which he observes, while described in great detail in the script, will be minimized by distance and camera angle in the shooting of this picture.

This change of heart is remarkable because it provides evidence that the Breen Office sometimes considered film language - in this case, long shots and close-ups - when making their decision, rather than relying completely on the written word. The reversal also mirrors or anticipates the reversal that each character experiences as he or she becomes convinced of Jeff's point of view. It seems that whoever occupies Jeff's (Hitchcock's) space slowly begins to see the events from his perspective. Ultimately, however, the Breen episode is somewhat ironic because the very distance that tempered their objections contributes to, even makes possible, the "peep show" quality that they condemned in the first place.

Though it solved political problems such as these, the size of the set also presented some technical difficulties. As noted earlier, the lighting schemes were controlled by a large console of remote-control switches, located in Jeff's apartment. The movements of the actors in the other apartments were guided in much the same way - not with switches, but with short-wave radio and hidden microphones. Every actor was fitted with a hidden microphone
and flesh-colored headset, so that when cameras rolled from the vantage point of Jeff’s apartment, Hitchcock could speak into the short-wave radio and direct the actors’ pantomime by giving cues as they performed, much like silent film direction.46

The actors had to hit their marks exactly because the camera’s long lenses had such a shallow depth of field; focus would be lost if an actor’s movement varied a few inches either way. The camera crew normally determines the proper focusing distance by running a tape measure from the focal point of the camera to the action, but the distances across the courtyard obviously made this impractical for every setup. So during the prelighting operation, Burks and his assistants “premeasured” as well; they measured from the camera to points of action all around the courtyard, creating a comprehensive chart as they measured. So for any given shot, a glance at the chart provided the exact focusing distance.47

The power of the technician’s glance to unify information and instigate action takes on special significance in this production. Many critics have argued that Rear Window’s core theme concerns the power of the (male) gaze.48 From his unique position, seeing but not seen, Jeff controls the actions of others, such as when he persuades Doyle to investigate or calls Thorwald on the telephone or sends him cryptic notes.49 Similarly, Hitchcock (with his short-wave radio) and his technicians (with their charts and consoles) see and manipulate the action from a privileged vantage point. Jeff’s apartment becomes, in a way, the architectural embodiment of the themes of this film.

But if the film is a comment on film spectatorship, it is also a reflection on the craft of film making. From what he sees, Jeff pieces together a story from fragments of plot and, like a director, persuades others to act upon it. Just as Hitchcock built a story from the plot elements at hand, so Jeff (and the film spectator) fabricates a persuasive narrative from the snippets of evidence he sees. The construction of meaning always takes place at two points – during the writing and during the reading – but here we have a text that echoes both types of work. Alternately active and passive, Jeff embodies the activity and passivity of both the film maker and the spectator; the director creates and waits, while the viewer sits and deliberates. Furthermore, Hitchcock’s storyboard, Hayes’s script, and Burks’s charts are particularly graphic illustrations of this construction work and this reflexive theme.

Ironically, given the significance of the gaze for this film, focus and definition presented the main problems during the shooting. At first, Burks used a ten-inch lens for shots mimicking Jeff’s view from behind his telephoto lens. But the depth of field was too shallow and objects did not show up clearly enough. For example, Jeff is looking through his long camera lens when Thorwald retrieves his wife’s wedding ring. The point-of-view shot was filmed from across the courtyard through the ten-inch lens, but it wasn’t clear that the object was a wedding ring. They tried it again
with brighter lights so that they could stop down (that is, make the lens aperture smaller) and gain greater depth of field. It still didn’t work, so they abandoned the lens, replaced it with a six-inch model, and compensated for the loss of magnification by placing the camera on a boom outside Jeff’s apartment. Burks announced, “The results were sharp as a tack.”

All these lights generated a lot of heat, which of course could be very uncomfortable for the actors. It was no coincidence that the story takes place during a heat wave. The courtyard lighting for daylight was especially intense because there needed to be a balance between the light intensity inside the apartments (which, as small enclosed areas, required less light) and the intensity of the courtyard (which, as a large area, required more light). So to prevent actors from burning up as they approached the courtyard windows of their apartment, Burks installed graduated scrims (translucent cotton fabric stretched in a frame) to diffuse the courtyard lighting. Even if the actors could stand the heat, sometimes the equipment could not. Stewart remembers:

The lighting for some shots really created a problem. One day there were several shots where the camera was behind me – that is to say, I was in the foreground and across the courtyard the action was in focus. Well, you’ve got a big depth-of-field problem with that. It would need twice the amount of light, so that the aperture could be kept small to keep everything in focus. Paramount took all the lights they had from all the stages not in use and it still wasn’t enough, then they borrowed lights from Columbia and MGM, and finally they could do the shot; the heat was really intense. Suddenly, in the middle of it, the lights set off the sprinkler system, not just a section of it, but on all the stages, and we’re not talking about little streams of water but torrents. Everybody stopped as we were plunged into wet darkness. But it never fazed Hitchcock. He sat there and told his assistant to get the sprinklers shut off and then to tell him when the rain was going to stop, but in the meantime to bring him an umbrella.

Fortunately, the set had been designed to deal, at least partially, with such problems. A complete drainage system had been installed to prevent flooding during the night scenes in which it rains; special “rain birds” – basically, glorified sprinklers – above the set provided this effect.

The shots in which the courtyard is reflected in Jeff’s telephoto lens also count as special effects. Because the successful filming of this reflection required precise control of its intensity relative to the ambient light, an image of the actual courtyard could not be captured. To solve this problem, the camera crew shot a transparency of the courtyard and projected the image onto a screen in front of Stewart, just out of camera range, so that the image would reflect off his lens. Likewise, Jeff’s climactic fall from his apartment window also required photographic effects. John P. Fulton, Paramount’s special effects expert, used the “traveling matte” technique for this scene. Fulton first photographed the patio, shooting straight down from Jeff’s window, with the detective and policeman poised to catch Stewart as he fell. Black velvet covered the area that Stewart would have occupied, effectively creating a “black hole” in the film. As the camera rolled, they acted as if they had just caught him. Then, several days later, in Paramount’s Stage 3, they shot Stewart as he hung from a window sill above mattresses covered with black velvet; he improvised his fall as the camera rolled. They could then superimpose this image onto the first and give the illusion that Jeff was falling out the window. A body double and a dummy substituted for Stewart at other crucial points in the scene.

Generally, the filming moved along smoothly, covering between four and seven pages of script a day. The daily production reports provide a precise summary of each day’s shooting and the progress up to that point, which the studios typically measured in terms of pages per day. (See the example at the end of this chapter.) Having determined the principal photography start and finish dates well in advance of shooting, studio executives merely divided the number of pages by the number of actual shooting days to find the “script average,” which in this case came to 6.75 pages per day. But by December 11, the actual average was 4.85, prompting a memo from the studio head, Y. Frank Freeman:
“Script totals 162 pages. Daily shooting average has dropped to 4.85. An average of 6.75 is needed to complete picture on a 24 day schedule. We are putting Unit 4 days behind today on the basis of averages, with every indication they will lose additional time.” What did it mean to be put behind schedule? Not a lot, but it did indicate to all that the production would probably go over budget, which it did. Principal photography officially closed on January 13, 1954, fifteen days behind schedule and coming in at $262,697 over budget. This clock watching was the primary means by which studios kept costs under control.

While not shot in strict sequence, the filming did follow a rough chronological order, in that earlier scenes were shot early in the filming and later scenes shot later. Most studio productions are shot out of sequence in order to make efficient use of available locations and the cast and crew’s time. But with only one set and all the actors signed for the length of the production, it was not necessary to shoot Rear Window out of sequence. Hitchcock’s extensive preproduction planning ensured that there would not be a lot of wasted film. A couple of interesting shots, however, did not make it into the film in any form. The script originally called for a scene with Ivar Gunnison, the magazine photo editor with whom Jeff talks on the telephone at the beginning of the film.

After the long crane shot over the photographs in Jeff’s apartment, which finally ends with the pile of magazines, there was to be a dissolve to a pile of photographs on Gunnison’s office desk. There followed a discussion about Indochina (“the next place to watch”) between Gunnison (played by Frank Cady, the man on the fire escape, who later became known to television audiences as “Sam Drucker,” the grocer from “Green Acres”) and his assistant. Gunnison telephones Jeff and they conduct their conversation just as we see it in the film, except that there is a cut-away back to Gunnison once during the talk. Gunnison’s office was built on Stage 10 and the scenes were shot, but Hitchcock must have found them superfluous and cut them soon thereafter. It is remarkable that the scenes were in the script in the first place.

Some scenes in the film (e.g., the opening crane shots) are not within Jeff’s point of view and the Gunnison scenes might have fit into this category, but they still violate the single-setting premise of the film. That Hitchcock finally recognized this bode well for the film, if not for Frank Cady.

**POSTPRODUCTION AND PUBLICITY**

Principal photography ended on January 13, although the crew continued photographing inserts, trailers, and retakes on January 14 and February 4 and 26. Editing began immediately following principal photography, and a final cut was available for musical scoring on March 22. Not slated for VistaVision, Paramount’s answer to 20th Century-Fox’s CinemaScope, Rear Window was shot “flat” and framed for exhibition in Paramount’s
nonanamorphic “cropped” widescreen process at an aspect ratio of 1.66 to 1.\(^{43}\) Paramount scheduled the film for a late summer release; it premiered at New York’s Rivoli Theater on August 4, 1954, as a benefit for the American–Korean Foundation, which was formed to provide emotional and material relief after the conflict in Asia.\(^{42}\) The Hollywood premiere occurred on August 11, 1954, at the Hollywood Paramount Theatre.\(^{43}\) The reviews were almost unanimously ecstatic, with the notable exception of the *New Yorker*, which called the film “claptrap” and its single setting “foolishness.”\(^{44}\) The generally good word of mouth translated into solid box office revenue: at $5.3 million in rentals, it came in fifth for 1954, behind *White Christmas*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *The Glenn Miller Story* (another James Stewart vehicle), and *The Egyptian*.\(^{45}\) It also received four Academy Award nominations – for cinematography, direction, sound recording, and writing – but ultimately did not win any Oscars.

If the “finish work” on the film was complete by the end of spring 1954, the publicity department continued to tinker with the results in its 1954 campaign. Through posters and press kits, this and subsequent campaigns effectively “remodeled” the “structure” of meaning in *Rear Window*. For example, the primary ad mat for Paramount’s 1954 campaign features a view of the courtyard from Jeff’s apartment, with Jeff in the foreground looking through his telephoto lens. The ad’s captions emphasize the “peep show” quality of the film, of course: “The most unusual and intimate journey into human emotions ever filmed . . . revealing the privacy of a dozen lives!” These dozen lives (Miss Torso, Miss Lonely Hearts, The Newlyweds, etc.) are pictured in the apartment windows with appropriate blurbs and exclamation points underneath each character. Significantly, though, the characters have been relocated from their original apartments. The Newlyweds, for example, have been moved to the apartment above Thorwald’s, and it appears that the group from the composer’s party is two floors above Thorwald. Other ad mats and posters also shuffled the characters around. The three-sheet design places Miss Torso in Thorwald’s apartment, Miss Lonely Hearts above her, and the

Newlyweds below. Even more striking is the decision to place Jeff and Lisa in Thorwald’s apartment for the six-sheet design and several other smaller ad mats. One ad even depicts Thorwald throwing Jeff out of (or pulling him into) the salesman’s apartment as Lisa looks on in her negligee!\(^{46}\) As the ads required simpler and more compact designs, they simplified and sensationalized the complexity of the original space. The construction of meaning
continued with the ad campaign, but in a significantly different direction, as we might expect.

But all the ads emphasize the voyeuristic theme of the film, either by depicting Jeff looking (or inviting us to peep) into an open window. When Paramount decided to re-release the film in 1962, they kept this approach. The timing was not fortuitous: The deal that Wasserman and Herman Citron, another of Hitchcock's agents at MCA, had brokered with Paramount required that the studio relinquish the film's rights to Hitchcock after eight years.67 Any deal that required a studio to give up rights was certainly unusual, but not unheard of. Otto Preminger owned the rights to The Moon Is Blue (1953) and The Man with the Golden Arm (1956); the rights to several of Cary Grant's films of the late 1950s and early 1960s reverted to him after eight years as well.68 Hitchcock had the clout at the time he signed with Paramount to demand such considerations. Paramount naturally wanted to squeeze as much out of the film as it could before the deadline passed. The timing was right in another way, as well: the enormous success of Psycho (1960) and Hitchcock's high visibility on television's Alfred Hitchcock Presents paved the way for another successful publicity campaign.

This time, while emphasizing the voyeurism theme much the same way as before, the ads also relied heavily upon the fame of Hitchcock himself. Hitchcock had been a familiar name in 1954, too, and he had certainly introduced himself to frequent moviegoers with his cameo appearances. But his television series had given him an even greater celebrity and made his profile something of an icon. As with Psycho, Hitchcock agreed to promote Rear Window through a number of television and radio spots (which was actually quite generous of him since the studio was getting all the revenues for this run).69 The publicity department recognized and capitalized on his appeal: “The new Hitchcock sell is strongly stressed in the teaser ads, in addition to his being featured in the regular ads and the all-new publicity features. The all-new poster campaign for Rear Window has been bolstered with special material keyed to Hitchcock's powerful box-office pull!”70

Reselling Rear Window in the 1960s: An ad mat from the 1962 campaign, which reused a graphic from the 1954 publicity but added elements to emphasize the success of Psycho (1960), Hitchcock's increased familiarity, Burr's new celebrity, and Kelly's royalty (mat 321). Ad courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

They emphasized especially Hitchcock's dry wit, which had become an important feature of his television series. The “special material” in the publicity packet included “The Alfred Hitchcock Coloring Book Contest” (“This is Alfred Hitchcock. He is the producer of Rear Window. He frightens people to death. He is a nice man. Be kind to him. Color him thin.”); radio ads with the master's voice (“If you scream yourself hoarse watching Rear Window and cannot tell your friends how much you enjoyed it, please
drop them a line."); and the Rear Window photo contest ("A tie-in with your local newspaper," reads the manual, "whereby readers are invited to submit photographs taken by themselves from the vantage point of their own ‘rear windows.’") The catch line for the campaign was "See it – if your nerves can stand it after Psycho!" and the print ads featured Hitchcock's familiar face. (Also notable is the emphasis on Raymond "Perry Mason" Burr in the campaign.) But the famous courtyard set is nowhere to be seen. With this "remodeling," the 1962 campaign relied more on name recognition than curiosity about the story to bring viewers in.

After this successful 1962 run, Hitchcock controlled the film for all future releases. In 1965, he negotiated its broadcast on NBC with the stipulation that it not be edited or cut in any way. According to the contract, NBC planned to show the film twice, once in 1966 and again in 1967 as a "movie special." Hitchcock negotiated a similar agreement with ABC in 1971 and that network broadcast the film the same year. By this time, literary agent Sheldon Abend had acquired the copyright to "It Had to Be Murder," the original short story, and filed suit against Hitchcock and Stewart in 1974 for copyright infringement. Abend eventually settled out of court for $25,000. But it was not the threat of a lawsuit that kept Hitchcock from releasing Rear Window again. Citron would cite only "personal reasons" for this decision, but Hitchcock might have wanted to create demand and save any future profits for his heirs; in a way, Rear Window and the other films might have acted as a trust fund.

So it was only after Hitchcock’s death in 1980, and the death in 1982 of his wife, Alma, that the re-release of Rear Window and four other films (Rope, The Man Who Knew Too Much, The Trouble with Harry, and Vertigo) once again became a possibility. In April 1983, Universal announced that it had licensed worldwide rights for these films in all media from the Hitchcock estate. Rear Window, the first of the re-releases, did extraordinary business for a thirty-year-old revival: Upon its opening, it broke one-day box office records for art houses around the country and ended up pulling in $6.8 million in its first five months. The success of the film was tarnished only by the announcement in April 1984 of another lawsuit by Abend, again contending copyright infringement. This one would take six years to resolve, the Supreme Court finally deciding in Abend's favor.

Universal once again "remodeled" the film for its re-release. In one particularly egregious example, they cut out the last shot of the film – Jeff’s curtains closing on the courtyard – in order to
replace the Paramount logo with their own, thus erasing the final segment of the narrative's circular and reflexive pattern. The film's themes and design received scant attention in the ad campaign as well. Relying primarily upon Hitchcock's name and recognizability – with the popularity of the auteur theory in the 1970s, Hitchcock's cultural capital had skyrocketed – Universal designed only one graphic for all the posters and print ads and ignored the courtyard set except in the press releases. The posters for each of the re-released films included one scene still from the respective production; for Rear Window, the shot depicted Jeff and Lisa lounging in his apartment, not even looking out the window. Nostalgia, romance, and celebrity had replaced the courtyard, voyeurism, and sensationalism as the primary structures of meaning in the ad campaign.

Yet Hitchcock's imprimatur was clearly visible, even overshadowing his construction. During the 1960s, Hitchcock's growing fame as the host of Alfred Hitchcock Presents contributed to the shift in focus in the ad campaigns from the set to the director. By the 1980s, his stature as an auteur was assured and the publicity campaign for the five re-released films reflected this: Hitchcock's rotund profile is the dominant graphic for the posters for all five films. By 1983, then, Hitchcock had become, just as the Rear Window courtyard had once been, the biggest thing since Cecil B. DeMille.

NOTES

Abbreviations in Notes

AHC Alfred Hitchcock Collection
CC Core Collection production clipping file: Rear Window
MPAA/PCA Motion Picture Association of America/Production Code Administration Files: Rear Window
PA – Press Paramount Collection – Press Books: Rear Window
PA – Prod Paramount Collection – Production Records: Rear Window
PA – Scr Paramount Collection – Scripts: Rear Window

All collections are located at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, California.

I would like to thank Val Almendarez, Jennifer Barker, and especially John Belton for their insightful comments on a earlier draft of this chapter.

1. "Detail Production Cost," January 24, 1956, PA – Prod. This calculation does not include Stewart, who deferred his salary for a percentage of the profits.
6. Paramount story summary, November 17, 1944, PA – Scr.
7. Diliberto, 299.
8. A friend brought this book and the impending sale to Hitchcock's attention in 1950, but apparently Hitchcock was either too occupied or not interested and let the opportunity pass. See Daniel M. Winkler to Alfred Hitchcock, December 18, 1950, box 107, folder 1309, AHC. My thanks to Val Almendarez for bringing this letter to my attention.
9. A treatment is an intermediate step between the story and the finished screenplay; it usually consists of a narrative containing all the principal situations and may include some dialogue or description of the settings.
11. See Logan treatment and accompanying letter from Kathleen Malley (Hayward's secretary) to Wasserman, dated April 20, 1953, box 52, folders 615 and 617, AHC. Logan's plan to direct Mister Roberts soon ran aground, too; John Ford and Mervyn LeRoy shared directing credit for the 1955 Warner Bros. film.
12. The agreement with Paramount called for Hitchcock to produce, direct, and eventually own all rights to five films (they turned out to be Rear Window, The Trouble with Harry, The Man Who Knew Too Much, Vertigo, and Psycho) and for Paramount to produce and own four (the studio ended up owning only one, To Catch a Thief). Donald Spoto, The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1983), 344.
14. Hitchcock was certainly familiar with Woolrich's work before encountering this particular story. Joan Harrison, one of Hollywood's first female producers, had been Hitchcock's longtime personal assistant and friend before moving on to produce Phantom Lady (Universal, 1944) from a Woolrich novel. Shortly after Rear Window's release, Harrison worked with Hitchcock again as associate producer of his long-running television series Alfred Hitchcock Presents, which adapted three Woolrich stories: "The Big Switch" (broadcast January 8, 1956), "Momentum" (broadcast June 24, 1956), and "Post Mortem" (broadcast May 18, 1958).


16. "Legal Notes Relative to Haygan Incorporated – 'Rear Window,'" October 1, 1953, PA – Prod. Unfortunately, the exact details of Hitchcock and Stewart's contract with Paramount are not a matter of public record.

17. Hayward received a special nod in the film as well; during Lisa Fremont's first scene with Jeffries, she describes her day: "Then I had to have a cocktail with Leland and Slim Hayward; we're trying to get his show." Incidentally, the wine bucket, dinner plates, and napkins brought by the waiter in that scene were flown in from the actual 21 Club in New York. They even flew in the waiter's jacket with a photograph of an actual waiter wearing it (in order to match the rest of the costume). See [Frank] Caffey to [Russell] Holman, transcripts of telegrams dated November 7 and 25, 1953, PA – Prod.


22. List of scenario completion dates, PA – Prod.

23. List of scenario completion dates, PA – Prod.


26. See Ronald Haver, David O. Selznick's Hollywood (New York: Knopf, 1980), 246; and Alan David Vertrees, "Reconstructing the 'Script in Sketch Form': An Analysis of the Narrative Construction and Production Design of the Fire Sequence in Gone with the Wind," Film History 3, No. 2 (1989), 87–104. Haver maintains that storyboards had always been standard procedure for animated films and special-effects sequences, and that Selznick's use of a storyboard for an entire feature was innovative. Certain modern directors, notably Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese, have revived the practice as a means of cutting costs and ensuring authorial control. See Scott Busby, "Imagining Movies," Premiere 2, No. 11 (July 1989), 68–73.


29. Woodcock, 37.


31. Mac Johnson to C. O. Erickson, October 5, 1953, PA – Prod. In the film, Thorwald lives at 125 W. 9th, but there is nothing in the records to indicate that the research team used that specific location, though they may have photographed courtyards in this area. Hitchcock also requested, a month later, tape recordings of sounds from Greenwich Village, especially from street corners at various times of day. See [Frank] Caffey to [Russell] Holman, transcripts of telegrams dated November 6, 1953, PA – Prod. The skill of the sound recording earned Harry Lindgren (the mixer), John Cope (his assistant), and Loren Ryder (the department head) an Academy Award nomination.


33. Universal News production notes, August 17, 1983, CC.

34. Paramount production notes, 1954, CC.


36. Paramount production notes, 1954, CC.

37. Gavin, 97.

38. Gavin, 97.


40. "Analysis of Costs of Scenario, Supervision, Direction and Cast," accompanying "Detail Production Cost," September 4, 1954, PA – Prod. Unless they had made other arrangements or were day workers, most actors had a weekly rate. The total number of days they spent with the production was divided by a six-day week; this figure was then multiplied by their rate to come up with the final pay. Ritter worked for 37 days at $4,166.67 a week. Grace Kelly worked for 50 days at $2,857.15 per week. Wendell Corey spent 51 days on the set at $2,500 per week. And Raymond Burr worked 41 days at $1,250 a week. Because Stewart and Hitchcock deferred their salaries, their paychecks do not show up in the cost analyses. They took home a percentage of the $200,000 mentioned above, but exact figures unfortunately are unavailable.

42. List of scenario completion dates, PA – Prod.
43. Joseph Breen to Luigi Luraschi, November 20, 1953, MPAA/PCA.
44. “Memo for the files,” November 27, 1953, MPAA/PCA.
45. My thanks to Barbara Hall for this insight, which can be found in an interesting discussion of Breen office practices with a longtime member of the Production Code staff: “An Oral History with Albert E. Van Schmus,” interviewed by Barbara Hall, Oral History Program, AMPAS, 1993, 346–348.
49. Belton, Cinema Stylists, 15–16.
50. Gavin, 78.
54. Gavin, 77.
55. Daily camera reports, January 11, 1954 (Setup #12) and February 4, 1954 (Setup #10), PA – Prod.
56. The scene in which Thorwald picks up Jeff and starts to throw him out the window caused some problems for the actors: Ted Mapes, Stewart’s double, sliced open his right thigh as he slid out the window, and Raymond Burr strained his back picking up Mapes. “Personal Injury Report” for Burr, January 7, 1954; “Personal Injury Report” for Mapes, January 11, 1954, PA – Prod. (The bill for Burr’s treatment on the set came to $15! See “Check Requisition” for Dr. Francis Abdo, January 15, 1954, PA – Prod.)
59. Final white script, December 1, 1953, 4–10, PA – Scr.
60. Daily camera reports, January 13, 1954 (Setups #12–13); February 4, 1954 (Setup #7), PA – Prod.
61. VistaVision made its premiere with White Christmas, which was shot from mid-August to December 1953, approximately the same time as Rear Window. It could be that, after his frustrating experience with 3-D during Dial M for Murder, Hitchcock decided against trying out another new technology.
62. Spoto, 353.
65. “1954 Box Office Champs,” Variety 197, No. 5 (January 5, 1955), 59. “Rentals” indicate the distributor’s share; “gross” refers to the total dollar amount taken in, which includes the exhibitor’s percentage.
66. All these ads are pictured in the Paramount Showmanship Manual, release season 1954–1955, group A-14, PA – Press.
68. It is only fair to note that because United Artists, through which Preminger released his films, relied upon independently produced films, it cut different deals than the other major studios.
69. See also letters to Hitchcock from Martin S. Davis, Paramount’s director of advertising, publicity and exploitation, box 52, folder 618, AHC. Unfortunately, Rear Window did not show up on Variety’s 1962 year-end rental chart, and box office grosses were not reported consistently at this time, so revenue figures are unavailable.
73. Diliberto, 300.
74. Harmetz, “Hitchcock’s Death May ‘Revive’ 5 Films.”
The budget for *Rear Window*, dated November 30, 1953.
### REAR WINDOW

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### CONCLUSION

Daily camera report for Rear Window, dated January 13, 1954, which includes the Gunnison scene.
Daily production report for *Rear Window*, dated January 13, 1954, the last official day of principal photography.