GUNSHOT/DOORSLAM:
Audience Expectations Through Light

by

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GUNSHOT/DOORSLAM
A THP SENIOR PROJECT

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Artistic Aims

Our senior project Gunshot/Doorslam is an outside perspective of how classic plays treat women. We examine this through putting Henrik Ibsen's protagonists from his seminal modern theatrical works, Hedda Gabler (HG) and A Doll'sHouse (DH), Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer, in a gay bar, where they share their experiences of ongoing destruction of their own classic female characters in the theatrical canon. The show has a second timeline where both Hedda and Nora get thrown into scenes from eachother's plays and try everything they can to stop a never-ending cycle of going between both the bar world and the world of Ibsen's plays and re-living the trauma that each of the shows produce for these characters and what they go through every time. This timeline seeks to be a juxtaposition of what the characters freedom would look like if Hedda and Nora's bonds were broken from Ibsen's text.

To understand where our show came from I think that it is valuable to explain the premise of both Hedda Gabler and A Dolls House. The story of Hedda Gabler, is she has just come back from her honeymoon with her newly wedded husband who does not love her and becomes quite evident through out the course of the play. A love interest (Eilert Lovborg) in the past comes back to the town where Hedda lives and is invited by the husband to welcome them into the community. It is quickly revealed that Lovborg is in the same academic field as her husband and that he has just published a book that has gotten him more sucess and fame than her husband as well as getting over a drinking addiction that has taken over his life for so many years. Judge Brack, a friend of her husband comes to visit and is speaking in sexual inuendos in order to have sex with Hedda. Eilert and his wife come over for dinner and Hedda and Eilert catch up and

reminisce on the past. Hedda, who becomes jealous of his success and not having a life of love that he lives, persuades him to go to a arty and to start drinking again and gives him a gun to ill himself with. He leaves with her husband and Judge Brack. Hedda finds that Eilert left his manuscript and burns it. News reaches Hedda from her husband that Eilert killed himself, and Judge Brack having seen the missing gun puts two and two together. He points out that he has ultimate control over Hedda, and rather than live a life of dealing with extortion, Hedda shoots herself offstage.

A Doll's House operates under similar circumstances. Nora, the main character is also newly married and is preparing for the holiday season. Her husband Torvald is a head of a bank and is starting to become moderately successful. Nora's friend Mrs. Linde pays the family a visit because she is seeking employment at Torvald's bank. Unbeknownst to Torvald, Nora has commited forgery and explains to Mrs. Linde that she forged the the document handing money over to her to pay for the betterment of Torvald's health which had been bad before the show starts. Krogstad, a low level employee at Torvald's bank, has been nothing but a nuisance in the bank and Torvald plans on replacing him with Mrs. Linde. Krogstad finds out and digs up the blackmail and the evidence to disgrace the Helmer family and sends it in a letter to Torvald. Mrs. Linde talks Krogstad out of it, however the letter gets to Torvald before anyone can do anything. Torvald not only does not defend and help and defend Nora but tells her that she has disgraced the family and that it is not reparable. Nora plucks up the courage to leave her family with the slam of a door.

Our show starts where the audience is introduced to the bar and Hedda bursts through one of the stage doors, slams it and fires off her gun twice. After a moment Nora

is also introduced after having done a scene in a dolls house and she enters in misery, having just reexperienced one of the scenes/moments in Ibsen's play. The light will have a sense of the ramifications of a prior disaster. It should seep in the room like spears in dull blues and greens and the space should change into a feeling optimism that breaks through using punchy and vibrant colors. The two of them flirt for a while and then speak metatheatrically about the restrictions that women have in the worlds of their respective plays as defined by the playwright, along with the implied definition of the restrictions placed on all women everywhere in a world "written" by men. For example, Hedda says "gonna run out of material not being able to talk about someone's cock in my basket or something," utilizing the innuendo-laden metaphor from Ibsens HG less euphemistically and more head-on manner than its use in that play, thereby beginning to loosen the stranglehold the world of that play holds over her in this new bar of exploration. Nora also has the constant struggle in the world of Ibsen's A Doll's House, of being referred to condescendingly as a bird by Torvald, her husband. Throughout G/D there is a sense of urgency about each character's inevitably having to go back and relive the same pain. During these scenes there Nora and Hedda are thrust back and it should feel like a gasp for a breath of air, as if they were drowning. Waves of fear should pierce through the hearts of the characters and be reflective within the ambience of the room. Floods of color should wash over the stage in waves with a brilliant softness and elegance. With a jolt, the characters are smashed into a chilling, unremorseful abyss of unhappiness. A shaft of light penetrates through the room while its surroundings have a grim, lifeless presence as if inside a cliff, created by greys, dark blues and murky colors. They are then interrupted by Torvald who repeats his lines from A Dolls House over and over again,

like a broken record while Nora commentates about why she is frustrated. This whole sequence of events ends with Nora slamming the door, and they find themselves in a suction and forced back into the bar and this time the change feels uplifting and pleasant. Light dances around in a whirlwind and eventually spreads back into the normalcy of the bar. Nora and Hedda get into an argument because Nora wants to end the pain and go back to living with Torvald. They both resolve the argument by breaking into song with a karaoke machine. They are interrupted by Man's voice who does a commical take on an opening announcement to the show that we are watching. This should feel like a glitch in the system -- something is not quite right -- it should have the sensation of taking off 3-D glasses in a movie theater. The characters are plunged back into the cold ominous experience and in walks Judge Brack from Hedda Gabler, and does portions of the Hedda shooting at Brack scene. He repeats the line "no, no, no, don't stand aiming at me!" with a similar commentary but with both Hedda and Nora. They both work together to see how they can stop going back and forth between both worlds. Nora shoots Brack, but the attempt does nothing. The show changes direction again with Torvald making another entrance, Nora faints and they enter a dreamscape. We see Hedda endure similar torture that Nora does and both Hedda and Nora work together to break the cycle. They realize the only way to break the cycle is to create a story of their own. The show ends as they are brought into a new world where all classic plays are strewn around the space and they are able to liberate themselves by destroying the classic works.

Audience Expectations Through Light

"In practice master plans fail - because they create totalitarian order not an organic order. They too rigid and cannot adopt easily to the natural and unpredictable changes that inevitably arise in the life of a community" - Christopher Alexander. Christopher Alexander is a well known American architect who is describing creative process and how it has to come naturally, otherwise it becomes unrelatable and very hard to connect with. In theatre this is most important because it is a living and breathing art-form that demands a human connection and that comes with choices that are made artistically from everyone involved. In this essay I will be looking at two different designer's perspectives and what their processes were to get to their final product. Jennifer Tipton, who did A Dolls House Part 2, based on A Dolls House by Henrik Ibsen and Richard Pillbrow who did Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, which is based off of Hamlet by William Shakespeare.

Jennifer Tipton was born in Columbus, Ohio and graduated college from Cornell University. She was originally a dance major, but after working as a dancer for some time, she noticed the importance of lighting and soon studied dance lighting with Thomas Skelton, becoming his assistant. Her first breakthrough in the lighting industry was in 1969, when she designed Our Town for Broadway, and her most recent big hit was A Dolls House Part 2 written by Lucas Hnath and To Kill A Mockingbird on Broadway. Past productions include The Testament of Mary (2013), La Bete (1991), Long Days Journey Into Night (1989), Jerome Robbins' Broadway (1989), Sophisticated Ladies (1981) and many more. All of the productions listed were either nominated, or winners of the Tony Award.

Richard Pilbrow was born on April 28, 1933 in London, England. He went to school at the Central School of Speech and Drama to become a Stage Manager. As years went by he discovered his passion for lighting and theatre in general. In 1982, Mr. Pilbrow won an award for USITT of United States Institute for Theatre Technology. It was the equivalent of a lifetime achievement award. Mr. Pilbrow was a co-founder of the Association of British Theatre Designers, the Society of British Theatre Designers, the Society of Theatre Consultants, The Association of Lighting Designers, and the Theatre Projects Consultants. Past productions include Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, The Rothchilds, The Life, Four Baboons Adoring The Sun, Tale of Two Cities and many more.

In my research, I plan to show how Lighting Designers have approached classic plays through a new and contemporary lens and how that can break expectations and expose new truths about texts that have been part of the theatrical world for so many years. The question I hope to answer through my research is; When reinterpreting established repertoire, how does the Designer, specifically through light, approach design to reveal text anew and challenge audience expectations?

One of most renowned lighting designers of our age, Jennifer Tipton, feels that she has a very technical and scientific process when she is coming up with a design for a show. “I just have one approach because I do feel light is the same for everything; for opera, for theatre, for dance. It varies because of the particular situation. The scale for opera, of course, is much bigger, though the time is just about the same. They give you very little time in opera. They give very little time in dance. In theatre there’s more time. There are previews, which you don’t have in dance and in opera. First performance is the

world premiere and the work is over. But anyway, the process begins by working on the plot, what I call 'the light landscape' of the production. I put it on the stage and use that landscape - use the vocabulary, use the light language, if you would to make sentences, paragraphs, whatever, in making cues onstage and that's true. Of course it is channeled by different circumstances, but that's true of everything I do." She is saying that everything starts from her plots, which are diagrams and draftings of where lighting instruments are hanging from within the theatre. Her decisions on where the instruments will go are based around the story the piece is trying to tell. The light, according to Tipton, serves as a guide for the audience members to understand the atmosphere location, time and how that effects what the actors and actresses are doing on stage.

In an interview with Theatre Now!, Mrs. Tipton was asked about how she thought of light and whether she felt it was connected to music in any sort of way. Mrs. Tipton was formerly a dancer and she feels that they are. "I've often called the lighting for the stage the "music for the eye," because it has the same way of making an atmosphere, making a landscape, changing fluidity from one place to another without seeming effort. I feel that the same rules apply in music: variation, structure and form, statement of theme, development of theme et cetera, et cetera. I also feel that the rhythm of a production is made by the lighting. If it feels like it is too long or too slow, it may well because the light is changing in a way that makes the audience feel that way. I definitely feel that light and music are very closely related." This relates to the audiences expectations because light helps to tell a story so that the audience can understand how a space changes over time and what those changes mean for the show and how that effects the characters in the story being performed onstage. Light should have a pulse that is pleasing to the eye, that

moves well throughout the piece and allows for the audience to be gripped into the story. The best lighting design, should not be noticed by the audience because of its ties to the story. If it is noticed, something has gone terribly wrong.

Richard Pilbrow has a different way of looking at light and has process seems to be more organic and ever-changing. “Derek and I talked long and intensely, trying to find a physical way of clarifying the script. Finally it grew on us that the shifting atmospheres of the play demanded very different handling. Its effervescence meant that its mood changed, like a spinning coin. Vaudeville-style bantering, fizzy dialogue, scenes within the Hamlet story, the surrealistic and haunting presence of the mysterious players - each needed a clarity of presentation. We decided upon a white, cool, almost circus-like light, but the vaudevillian exchanges; a realistic, if romantic atmosphere and a richly colored light of “supercharged” nature. Sunsets, storms and dawns for the surrealistic interventions for the players.” Mr. Pilbrow is reflecting on his experience working on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and is speaking about what his thought process was when he was adapting Shakespeare. It was heavily reliant on the directors vision for the show and what ideas needed come across in order for the show to make sense to the audience. Shakespeare alone is hard to understand for most audiences. To take that and adapt it into a new story with the references to Shakespeare put a whole new level of difficulty to the story itself. That is why Mr. Pilbrow speaks about communication and how that is an integral part of Design and putting ideas onto the stage.

Lighting is only one piece to the puzzle of theatre. Light cannot effectively exist without a set to create a worthwhile experience for the characters onstage and the live audience experiencing the event. “I had been asked by Hal Prince to light a new

Broadway Musical that he was to direct: Zorba, based on the famous movie Zorba The Greek. Boris Aronson, designer of Fiddler On The Roof, was to design. This was a wondrous piece of theatre. Set in Greece, the action moved from a colorful taverna to the town square of a white washed village. I tried to capture the essence of the blinding light of Greece. Boris possessed this astonishing way of capturing time and place in simple but powerful elements of scenery. The village was made up of three-dimensional fragments of white houses arranged as if climbing up a hillside. Boris's concept concept of sky presented a lighting challenge. How to capture the deepest of blue sky contrasted with the blazing sunlight? The sky cloth was created almost like sculpture. Layers of scrim of differing transparency got thicker and thicker as Boris sought his idea. The texture was extraordinary; the amount of light needed to punch through it was pretty excessive, too." Pilbrow is giving an example of how he had to make critical lighting choices based on what the set designer was providing him with. The set provides a subject for the lighting designer to light depending on the circumstance and adds another layer to the story being told. The other subject is the actors themselves but the need a space to be in, and that is constructed by communicating about how it should look and what would need to happen in order for that to happen.

When re-imagining classic works, how does the Lighting Designer approach design to reveal new text and challenge audience expectations? It is different for every designer and has to do with what works best for them. Each piece is unique and that comes a different challenge. Design is heavily based upon telling a story and that story comes with research, with communication and collaboration, and most importantly, understanding the text with which one works.

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Reflection

This process started out by using the story of Hedda Gabler and integrating Nora as a device to guide Hedda's character into living life in a less destructive way. It did not sit right to have a classic love story so we felt that we needed to take Ibsen out of the show and critique Ibsen and how he uses his characters because of the treatment of women. We decided on pulling both characters out of their stories, placing them in a bar, which is aparently very much part of the queer experience and have them discover eachother and eachother's stories and fall in love in the end. It was a long process of trial and error, most of which happened in the rehersal studio, as this was a devised process. While the script was being written, we would have a direction in which the script was going and we would try ideas out of what we had with the actors. There are two secondary characters worth mentioning that enhance this struggle between worlds. There is one male actor who plays all of the male characters from both shows can not say anything except repeat the male lines from the shows of Hedda Gabler and A Doll's House and a bartender that is supposed to represent the optimistic future for female roles in a theatrical cannon for the future. The male presence allows for the struggle of the female characters to be brought to light.

The bar exists out of space and out of time, compared to the theater moments that are very traditional and are of a huge contrast. We felt that the theatrical moments, while comical, had to feel cool in tone. The bar scenes are mimicking the lesbian bar scene in New York City. The space will feel inviting, and a place where these two characters can feel at home. For example, I will be using LED's and warm frontlight to make the space

colorful but not over the top. The shift into the theatrical scenes is going to be a very stark contrast it will be more harsh concentrated and cooler tones.

The most important idea for me in this process was to be true the story and to emulate that through light. This consisted of constantly going to rehearsal to see show the story had evolved and that the changes would look like for me and to figure out how that would work onstage visually. We originally toyed with the idea of an Aroura Borealis in a void space where the characters would start in and then over the course of the show there would be revelations of different aspects of the real world that Hedda and Nora live in. Our first instinct was that it was a bar in the middle of the woods, in the middle of no where, and the bar was going to have a delapidated wharehouse-like quality to it. In the first renditions of the show we were going to have a large window looking into the outside world and the outside world looking in. We kept the bar idea but decided that the woods idea did not fit with the narrative that the show was evolving into. In that rendition I thought about texture and how to emulate light breaking through trees to add another dimension to the space. Once the script was close to complete, I completely changed the way I was thinking about light. The set design narrated where light was going to fall and how the action in rehearsal moved in relation to the set changed acting areas and therefore the plot as a whole. I worked with contrasting colors and using the color wheel to accurately work with shadow and where light sources would be coming from in the bar. I found that lavender and blues worked beautifully for front light because a brilliant amber that works well on skin can be achieved, while also encapsulating the colder tones for the theatrical scenes at higher intensities. I did research into bars, and was able to travel to Amsterdam where Ibsen premiered Hedda Gabler and was able to experience the

European bar. I found that bars have a similar color palates of pinks, greens, blues and oranges.

The show ended up never making it to the space because of the Covid-19 pandemic, however the time we spent together was quite productive and we worked well together as a team. During the life of the show, up until the end, we used our time in the studio to hold rehearsal. The process for me was very slow in the beginning because it was all about the actors and the Director getting familiar with devising and how to apply devising concepts to our show. Even though it was not very helpful for me, it allowed for me to see what that process was like, and it sparked ideas for me as a designer, and there was more of an awareness of how everything would look had it been transferred to the space. In that period, there was no set design, so I did not have a real idea about the space I was working with, so the development of the plot was very slow and stagnant at times. I decided that I would create two different plots, one that would that would assume that there wasn't a set and one that would formulate after the set design was released. I used Vectorworks, a CAD program the measure how big beams would be on the stage and what I would need to fill the stage properly.

As I was writing the Artistic Aims, my concepts completely changed and I think it worked better for the show. I realized the importance of writing concept statements and how that can serve as guide to how the show that is being constructed and how it better organized my thoughts on this project as a whole. The research images helped me visualize how the show was going to flow from a lighting perspective. This valuable lesson I think will help my designs grow and develop better for the future. I originally thought of it as a rep plot where I would cater the design to the theatrical elements on the

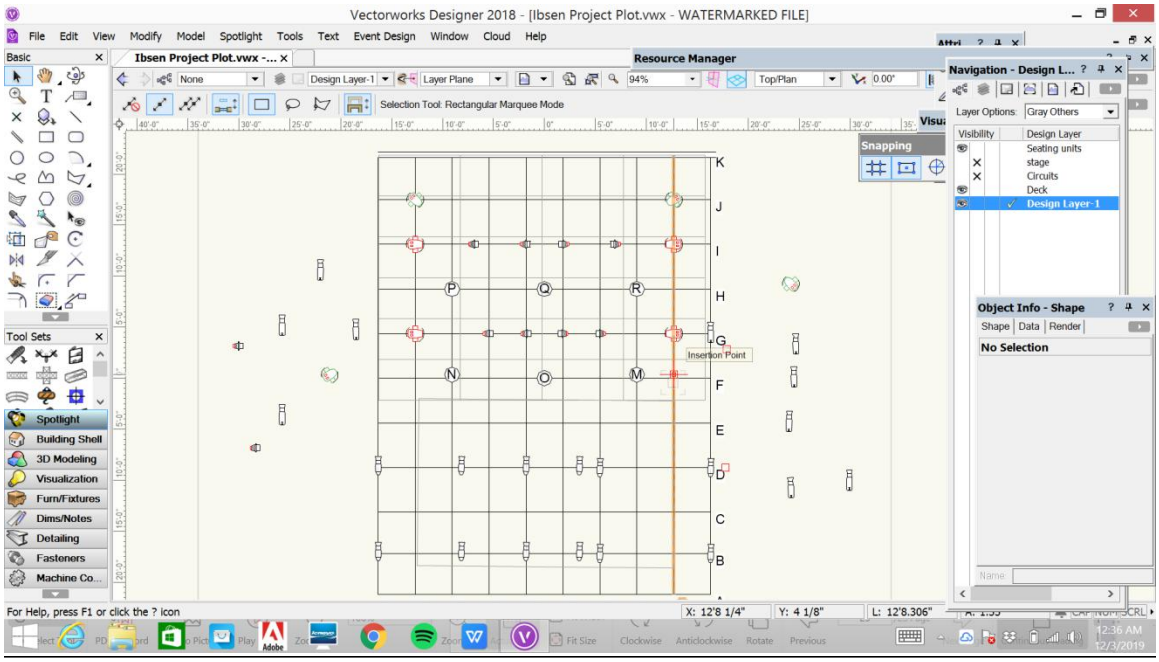
stage, but that is not really design. Lighting Design is bigger than that and it should be catered more to the show rather than what fits. Once we got closer to the tech week, I had my plot done almost a month before what would have been load-in. There was a miscommunication about what was allowed to be done within the space, nothing was to be moved, taken down or switched out from the rep plot that was already existing. So, I to just add to the plot that was aleady there which basicially took away the point of my senior project which was to design. With that all the paperwork created for the show was no longer relevant.

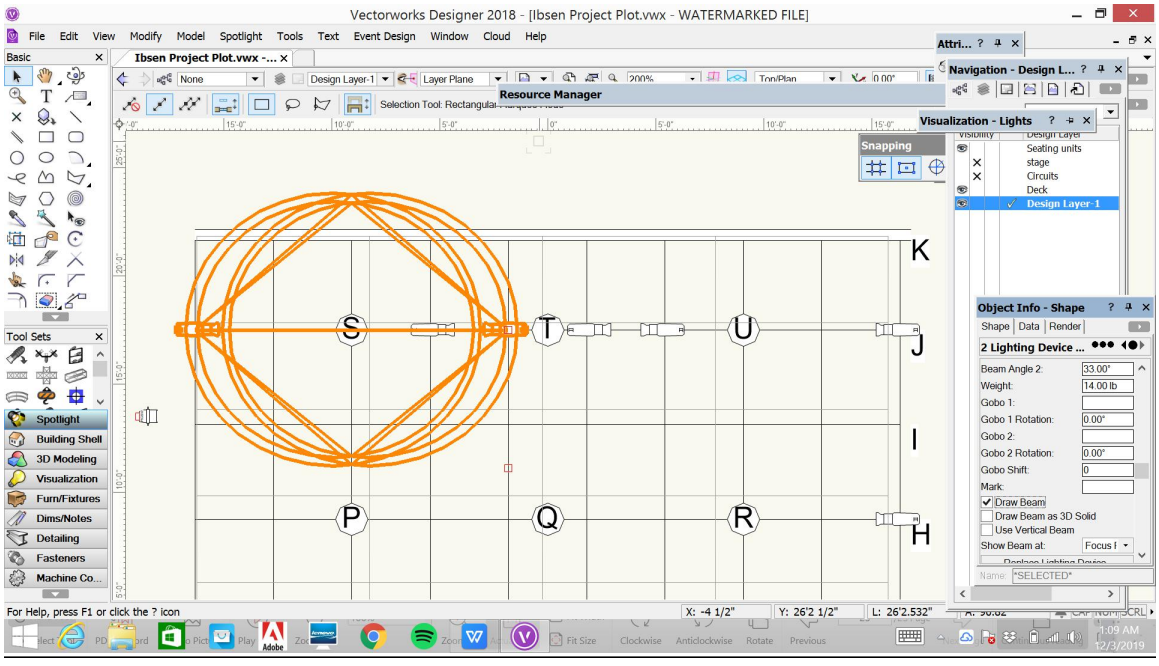
Since the beginning we toyed with the idea that the layout of the audience should have an integral part in how the show is designed and opeates within the world of the show. In the initial conversations we spoke about bar seating and that we wanted that to be part of the action and experience of the bar. It then changed to having the bar seating proscenium based on how the narrative of the story was shifting. With that the idea came about of using practicals on the bar tables in the audience in addition to the regular house lights, to immerse the audience experience into the show.

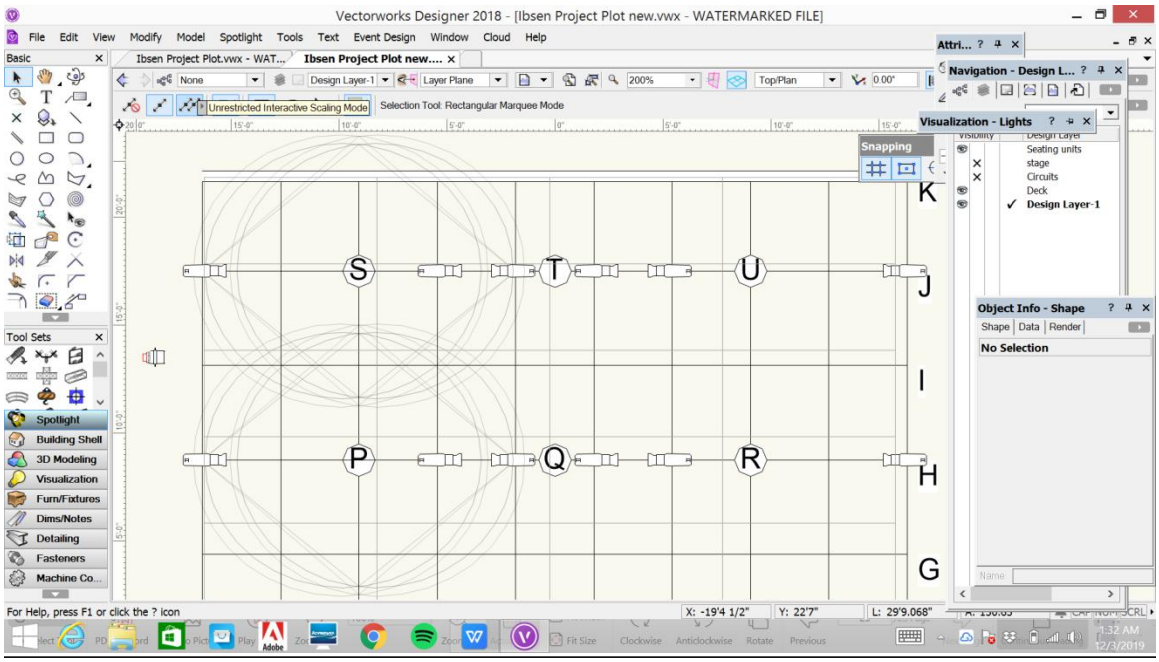
As a theater major, one of most important lessons that I have learned is how to overcome obstacles and learn from mistakes. Within the senior project there were many trials and tribulations that were nothing short of easy to figure out. To start the fact that the project did not actually get seen by an audience because of Covid-19. In the wake of impending doom, we pressed on with unanswered questions about how to proceed if the theaters closed on campus, we continued as if the show was happening. This was an obstacle because that halted fundraising and as a result put designs into question. The next question was how to proceed, and what we could to plan to show at least something

to the faculty. It turned out that we were able to get footage of an unfinished product in a studio in order to have something to show. It turned out well but the careful planning that went into it and the extensive planning for worst case scenario became a regular consideration.

Plot Progress



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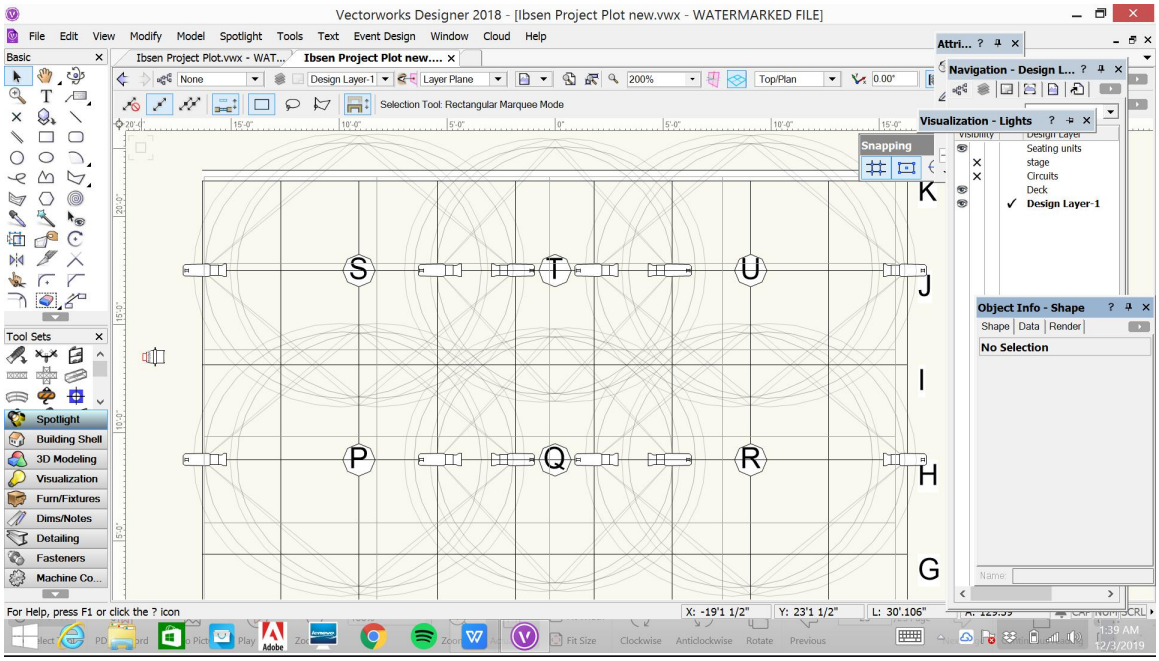
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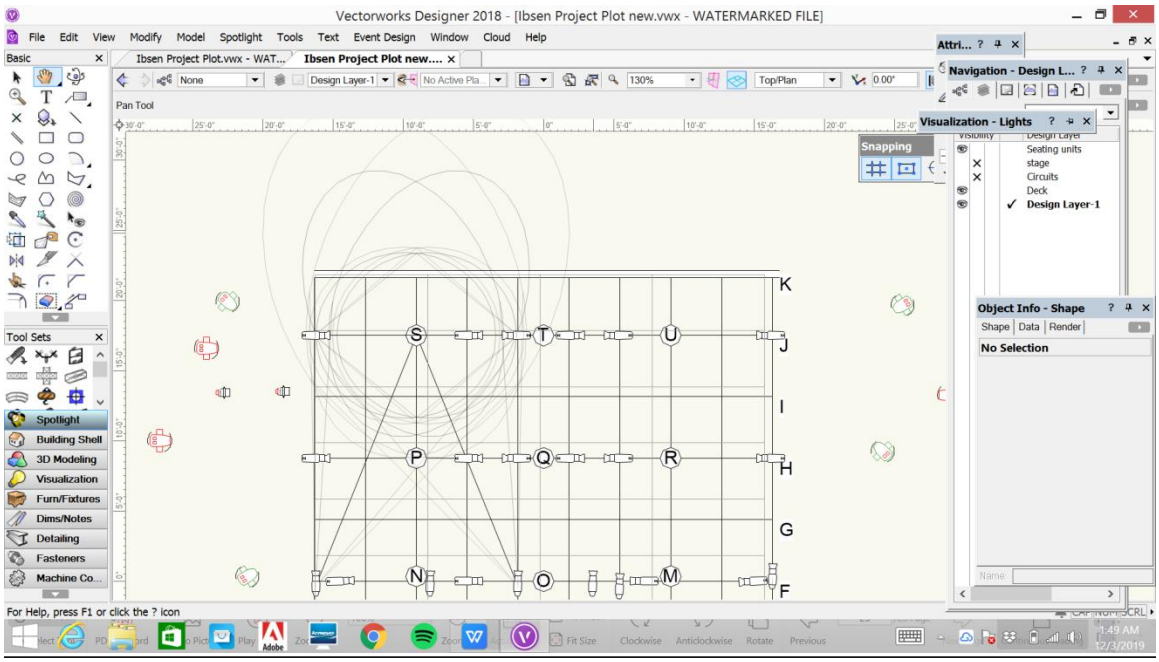
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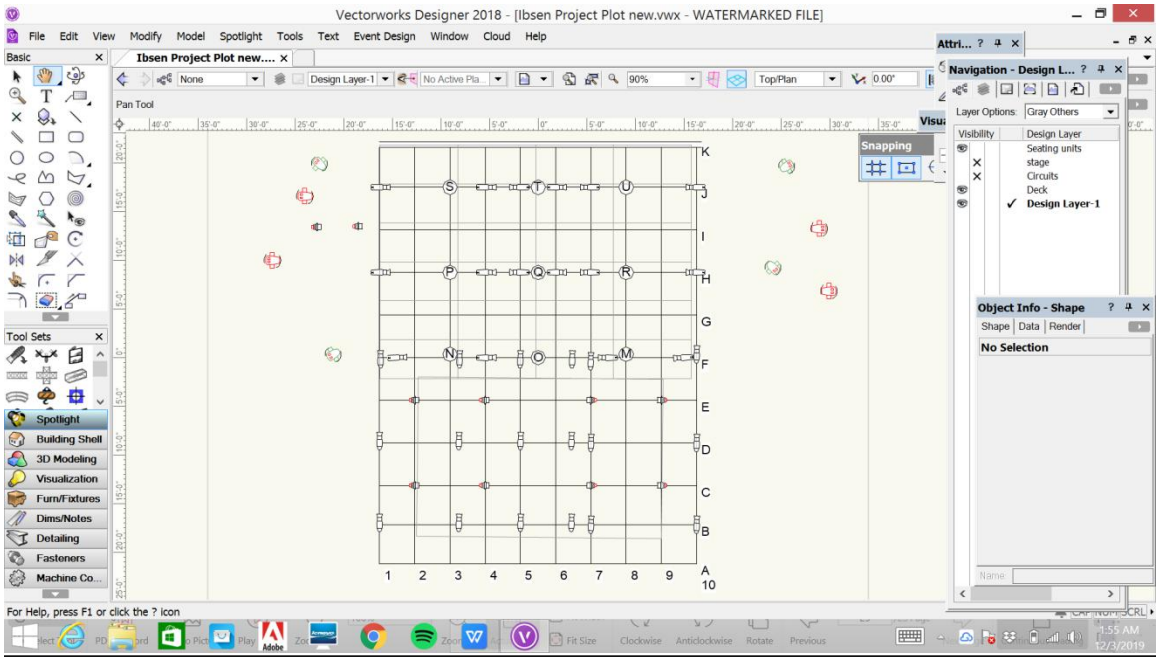
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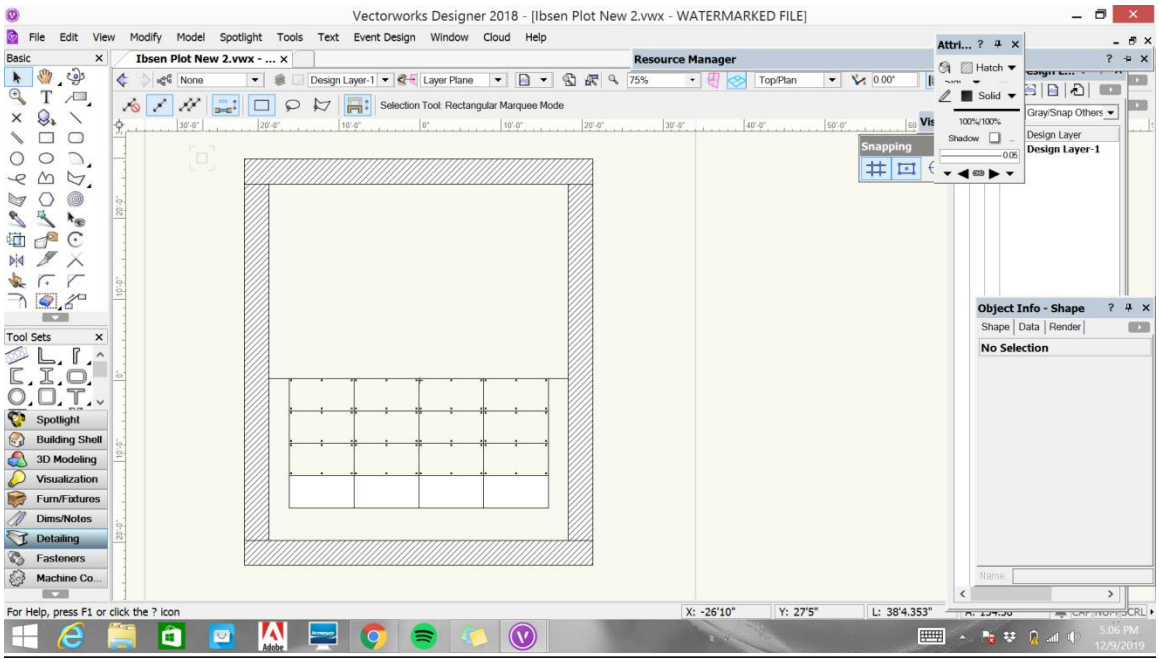
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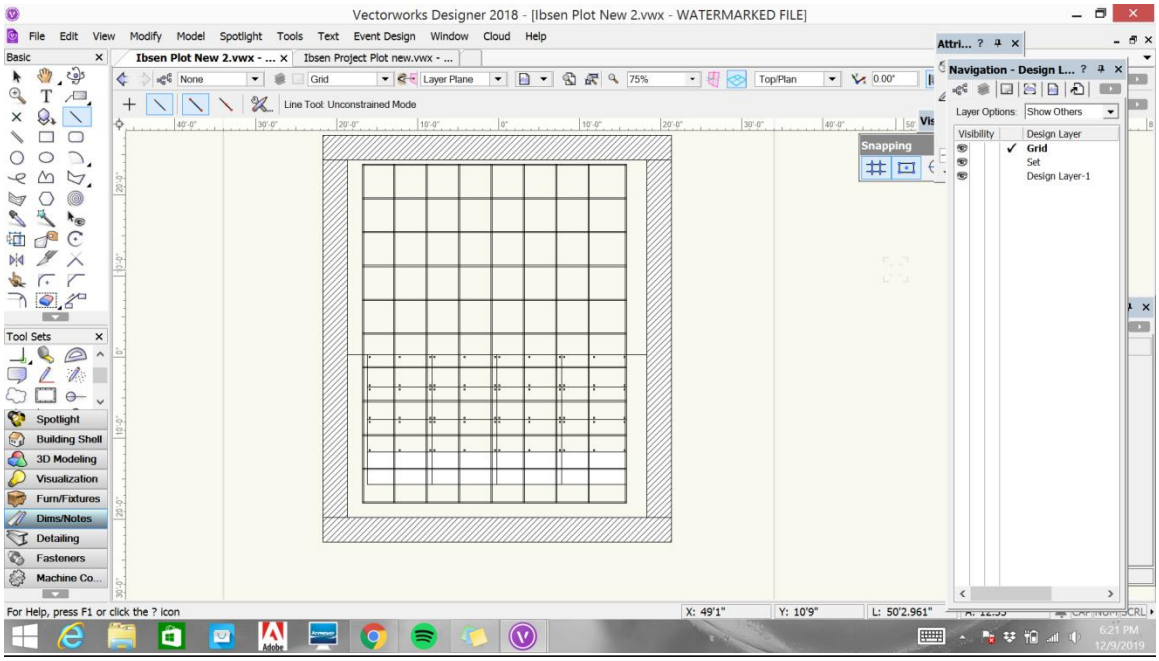
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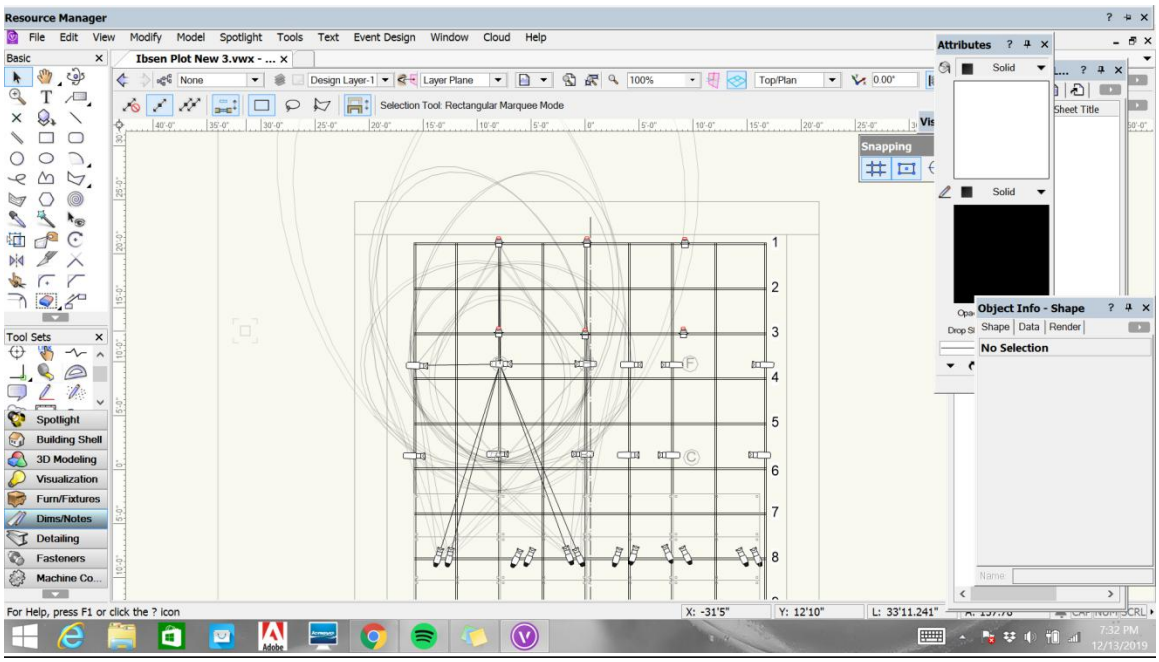
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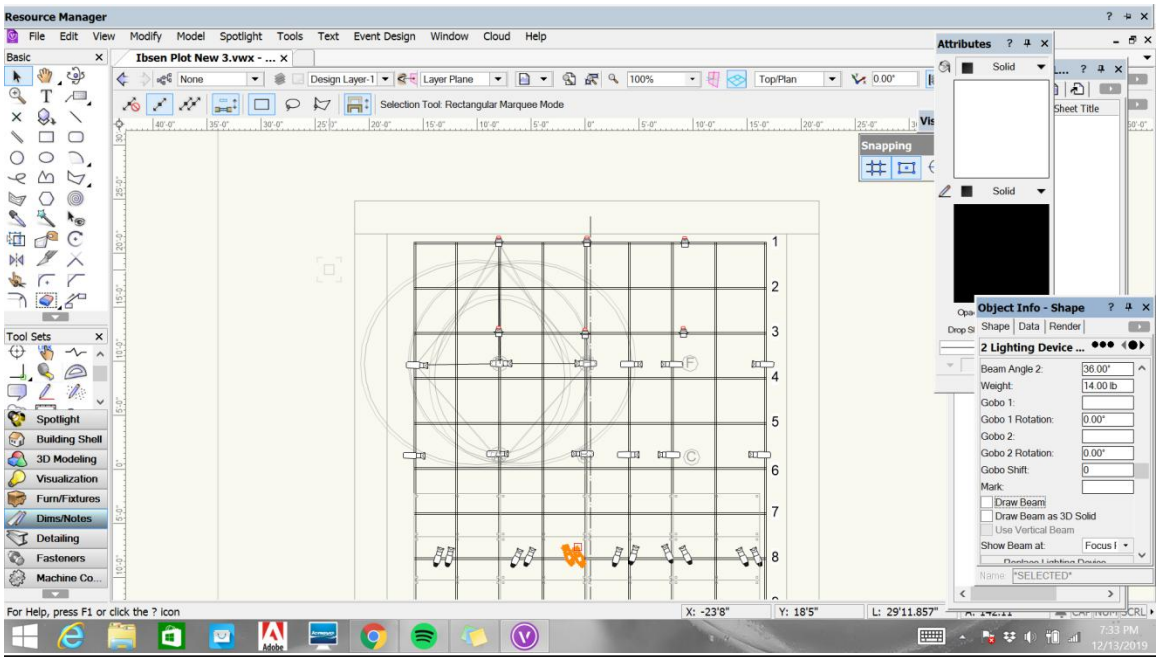
3D Modeling
Visualization
Furn/Fixtures
Dims/Notes
Detailing
Fasteners
Machine Co...
For Help, press F1 or click the ? icon
X: -31'5"
Y: 12'10"
L: 33'11.241"
7:32 PM
12/13/2019


Resource Manager
File Edit View Modify Model Spotlight Tools Text Event Design Window Cloud Help
Ibsen Plot New 3.vwx - ...
Selection Tool: Rectangular Marquee Mode
Snapping
Attributes
Object Info - Shape
Shape Data Render
2 Lighting Device ...
Beam Angle 2: 36.00°
Weight: 14.00 lb
Gobo 1:
Gobo 1 Rotation: 0.00°
Gobo 2:
Gobo 2 Rotation: 0.00°
Gobo Shift: 0
Mark:
Draw Beam
Draw Beam as 3D Solid
Use Vertical Beam
Show Beam at: Focus I
Name: *SELECTED*
Tool Sets
Spotlight
Building Shell
3D Modeling
Visualization
Furn/Fixtures
Dims/Notes
Detailing
Fasteners
Machine Co...
For Help, press F1 or click the ? icon
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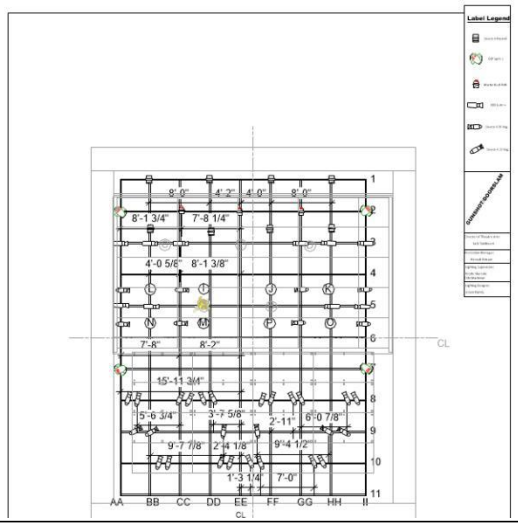
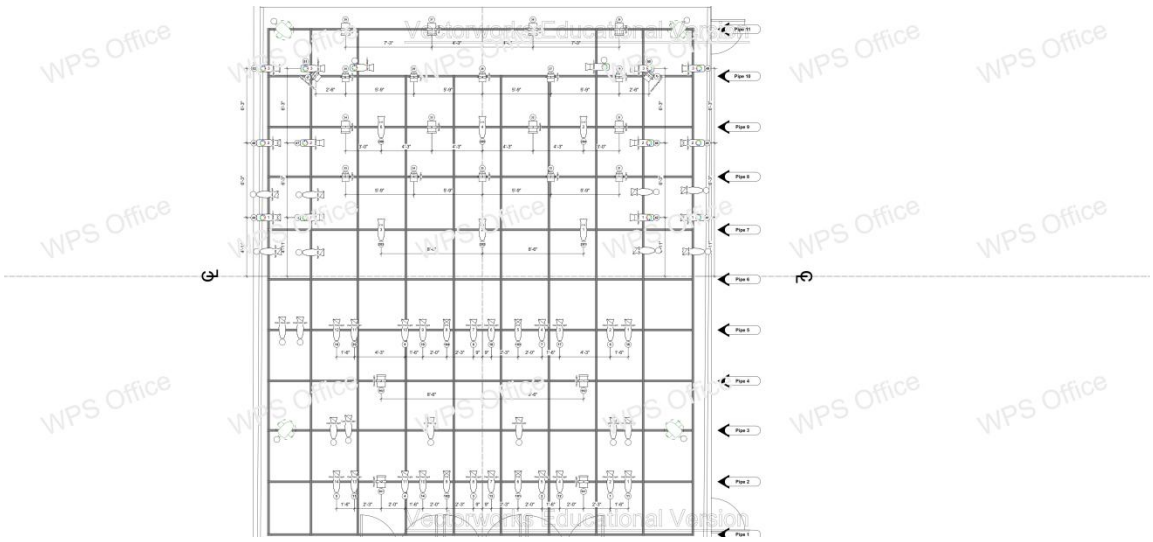
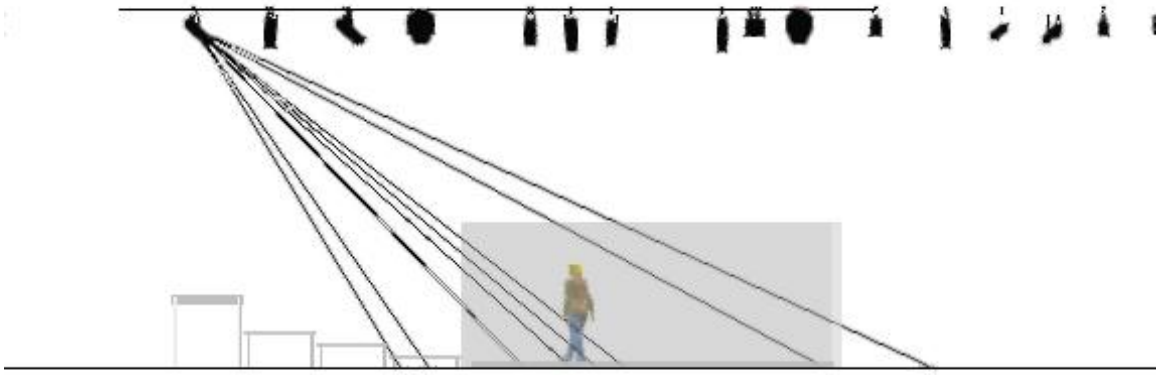
Y: 18'5"
L: 29'11.857"
7:33 PM
12/13/2019



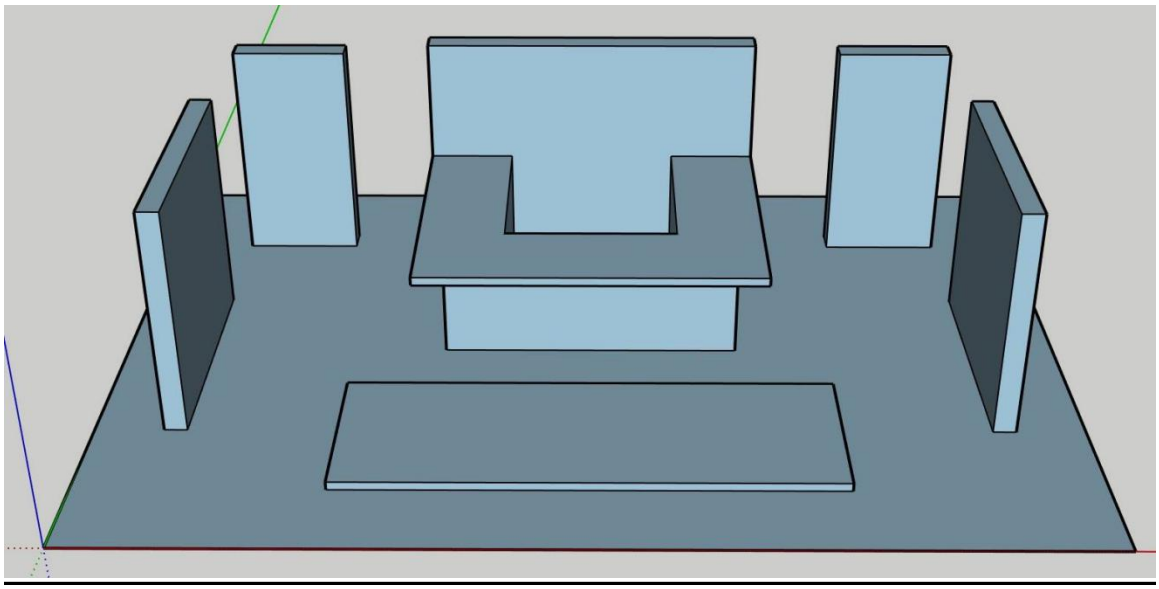
This plot is where I ended up, however there was a rep plot that could only be added to according to the production manager, I took my plot and merged it with the already existing rep plot. The circles around the letters are the beams of the light and how much space it is taking up onstage. I was creating what are called acting areas. I split up the stage into five acting areas. This was necessary because of action happens in and out of the doors on either side of the bar upstage center. So I needed an acting area for the bar, for the action stage right door and the stage left door. There is a dance floor that is downstage center, which also is where all the theatrical moments happen so that needed two acting areas, I created specials to fill in the rest that needed to be lit including a dart board. This is what the changes looked like to fit the rep plot:

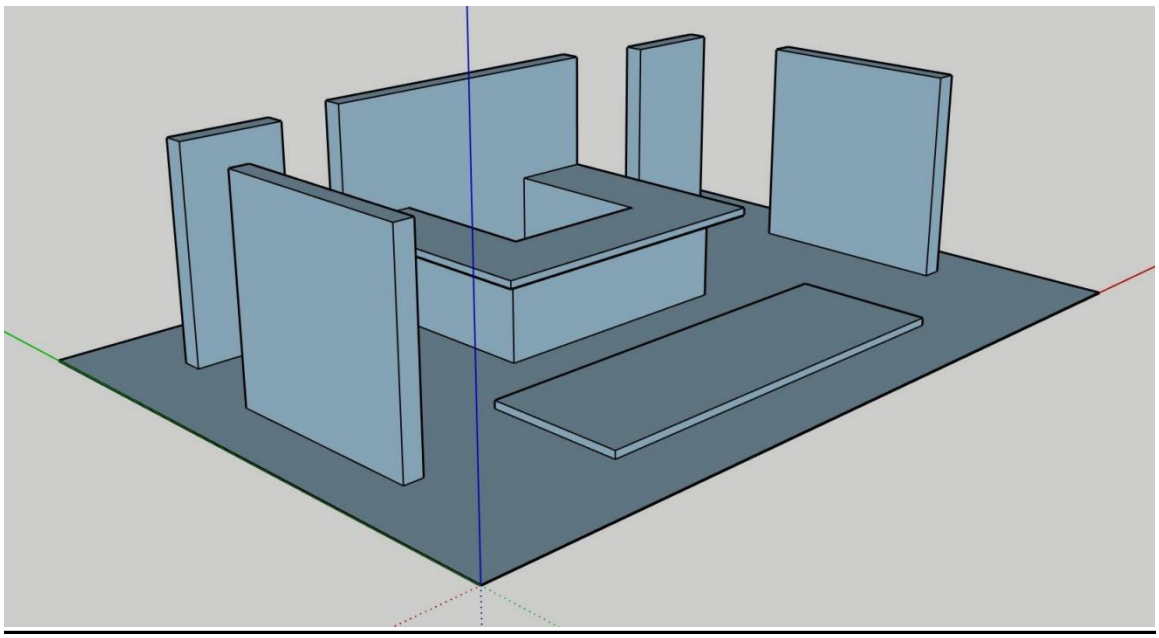


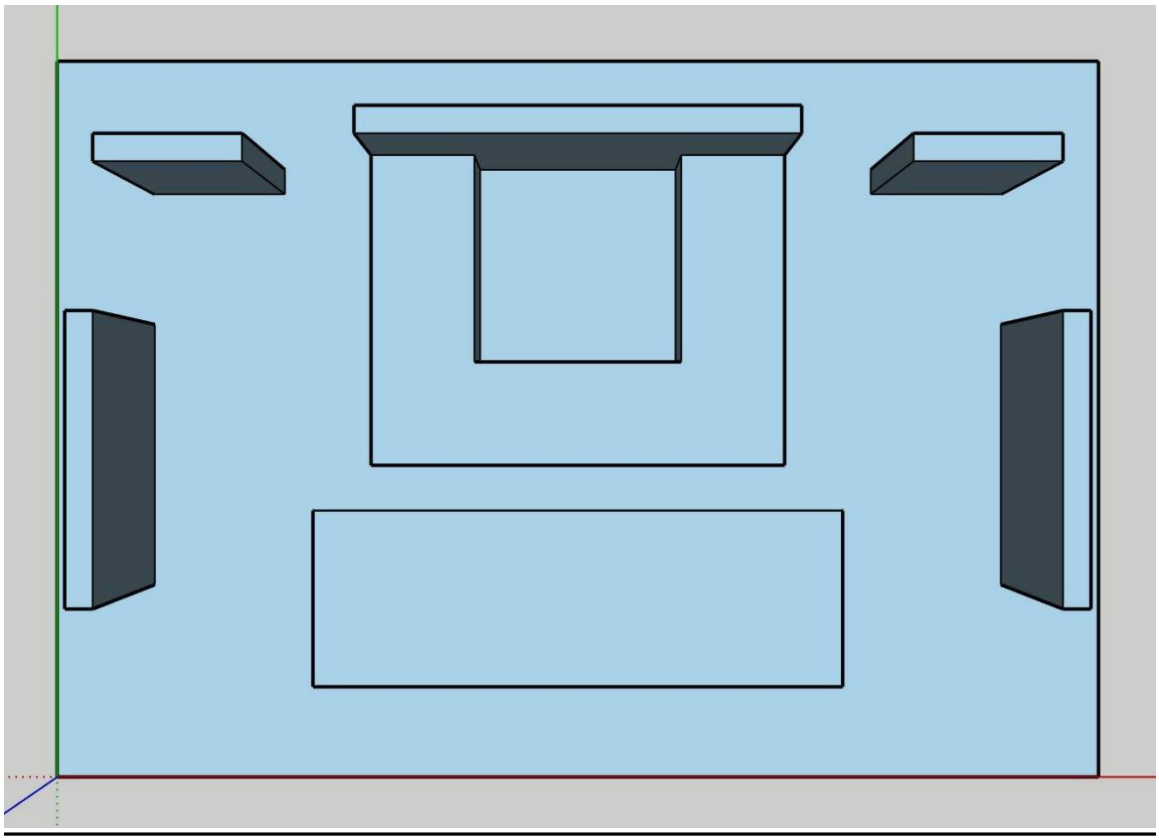
This is what a section would look like from my plot:

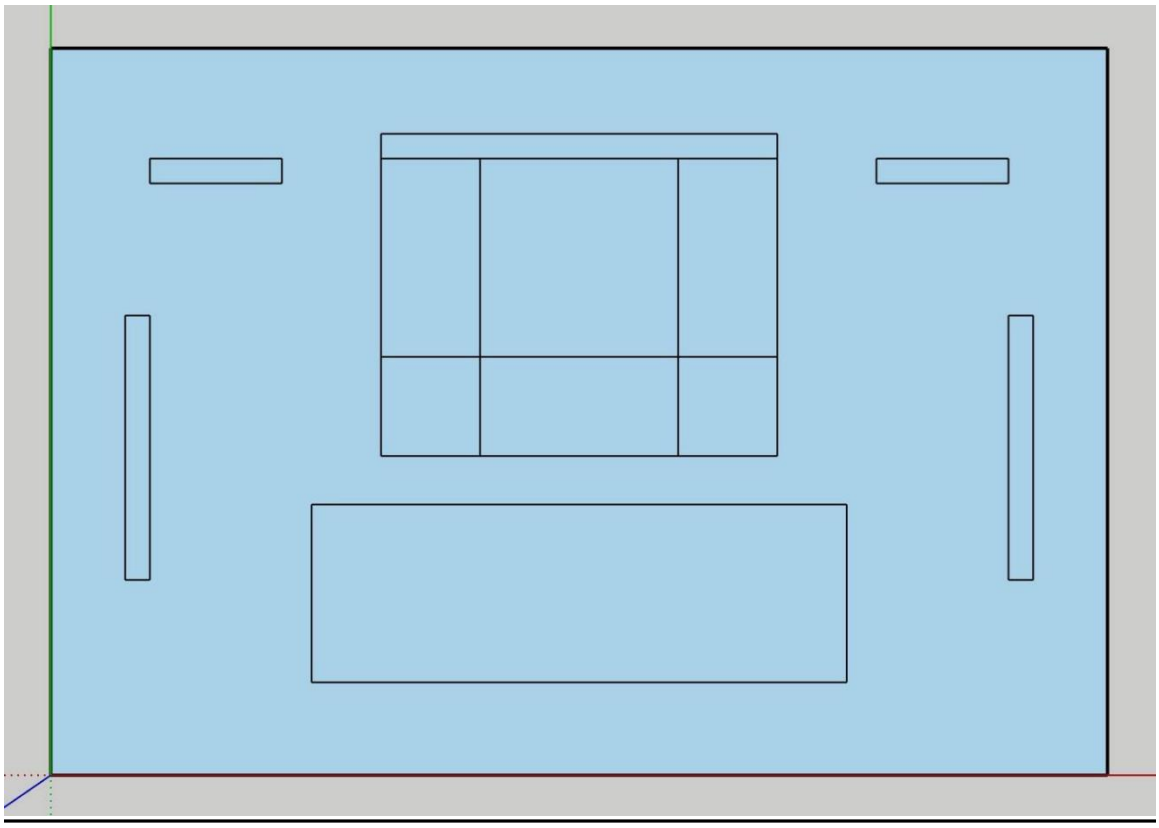


Set Design







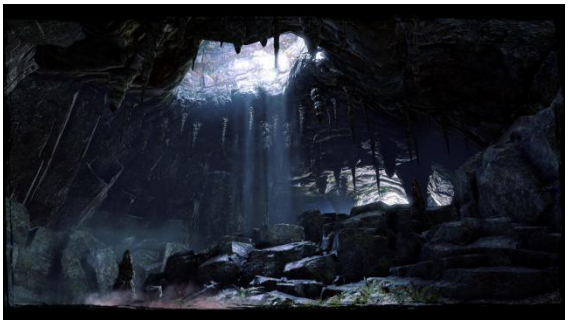


Research Images

Prior Disaster same image but with teal and dark blue

Optimism punchy colors - red and orange to be added this is the normal bar world

Gasp for breath of air, drowned in color, should be overwhelming



Cave like ambience should have this vibe but also have a harsh traditional stereotypical theater light at the forefront

Suction into normalcy which is the optimism

Image

Glitch

Dreamscape, should feel like an aroura and
Have same color palate as in photo

Harsh sunlight coming out of the set for library
Breakdown scene