

CREATIVE ART

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Cedric Gibbons

By RALPH FLINT

IF YOU are one of that sweeping, though perhaps undistinguished, majority given over to the magic of the movies and are more generous in the matter of screen credits than G. B. Shaw, you will doubtless have noticed the name of Cedric Gibbons occurring with a vast persistency on each and every credit list of Metro - Goldwyn - Mayer pictures. Following close upon the mellow roar uttered at the beginning of each M-G-M film by its trade-mark lion and trailing the preliminary announcements concerning those major luminaries that give each film its special appeal and box-office draw, you will notice a list of men responsible for the various technical aspects of the company's films, men and women who may be as the dust beneath his feet to Mr. Shaw, but who are, when all is filmed and done, the secondary powers behind the cameras without whom there would be no cinema. In particular does such a man as Cedric Gibbons deserve more than a passing salute, since he is one of the real focal points of the studio, coming next in directorial power to the actual supervisory heads.

At the Metro-Goldwyn studios in Culver City, just a few short miles from Hollywood proper, Mr. Gibbons rules supreme as art director. He is at the head of an intricately organized group of technical experts and artisans, numbering nearly two thousand individuals, and is responsible for the artistic investiture and pattern of some fifty or more feature films per annum. Somehow or other, designing and creating in three dimensions the thirty or more sets, as the case may be, of the average feature film, seems a Herculean task compared with

the mounting of the average stage production. It is not merely a matter of getting the designs to fit the needs of the picture, but of having them appear in proper sequence on the studio schedule so that they do not interfere with the materialization of other productions that are being shot simultaneously. Mr. Gibbons' task is a matter of esthetic, architectural, industrial and economic planning and execution on a rather heroic scale. Compare, for instance, the relatively simple sets that graced the stage versions of *Grand Hotel* with the amazing display of a *de luxe* hostelry in all its endless detail that Mr. Gibbons evolved for Metro's recent screen production of the play.

As a matter of fact, I am inclined to think the pitch of excellence brought about by the various Hollywood producing staffs is one of the wonders of our present day and generation, taking into consideration all the many interlocking parts that go to make up the finished product.

Without meaning to create a false impression of Mr. Gibbons, I must refer to him as the dean of the Hollywood art directors. He has been ruler of the artistic destinies of M-G-M for some thirteen years, and thirteen years is a long time in Hollywood from almost any angle. Since he began his screen career in 1912, he has worked on nearly six hundred productions, averaging thirty sets apiece; he has the unique record of having been connected with only two film companies in all this time.

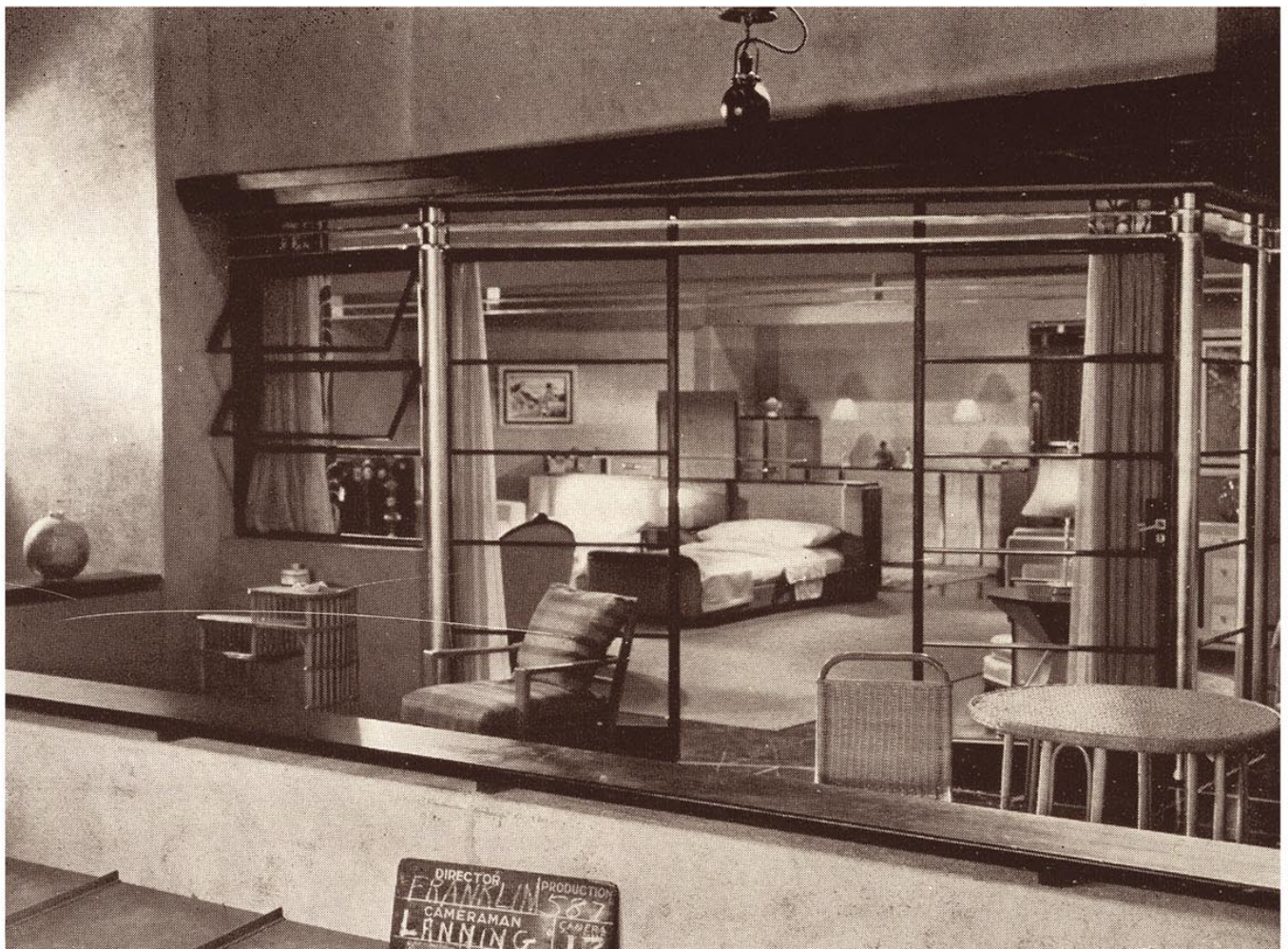
Mr. Gibbons knows the problems of designing for the cameras from the ground up—a wholly different problem from that of the

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theater, since all effects have to be considered from the point of view of the one-eyed camera and all values and lines and action have to conform to the special qualifications that camera technique imposes. Matters of scale and proportion come in for special shading and emphasis; the issues of tone and color ask for a wholly different treatment from that in any other field of designing. Reproducing plans or drawings or photographs of studio sets fails to give an exact understanding of the artist's contributions any more than in the case of the theater. Exhibitions of stage designs are invariably a mere suggestion of the finished work. One of the accompanying views of Mr. Gibbons' interiors indicates the architectural liberties he is able to indulge in when plan-

ning a series of camera "shots"; here he has brought the overhanging balcony into a forced relationship with the sofa below in order that certain bits of action may be aligned in a certain way by the cameras.

The scope of Mr. Gibbons' knowledge of designing must perforce include all the so-called tricks of the camera in order to bring out the best results from his sets, and I feel sure that, if Mr. Shaw were to stay by Gibbons' side for the course of the planning and execution of a single film, he would reconsider his point of view about the matter of screen credits. Even if he is dean of the Hollywood designers for the cinema, Mr. Gibbons is still a comparatively young man and has a brilliant future in this newest and most elastic of the arts.



Set Designed by Cedric Gibbons for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Screen Production, "Private Lives"



*Set Designed by Cedric Gibbons for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Screen Production,
"Private Lives"*



*Set Designed by Cedric Gibbons for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Production,
"The Fall and Rise of Susan Lenox"*

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