

## Textile + Design Laboratory Case Study 3/ 2010: 'The Lovely Bones'



**Project title:** Sampling and production of costumes for 'The Lovely Bones' film, 2009.

**T+DL Partner:** New Line Cinema

**Project Co-ordinator:** Kate Hawley, Additional Costume Designer

**Website:** [www.lovelybones.com](http://www.lovelybones.com)

**Background:** *The Lovely Bones* is a film adaptation of the award-winning, bestselling novel by Alice Sebold. Set in the early 1970s, and filmed in New Zealand and America, it tells of a teenage girl watching from an after-life as her family, and she herself, come to terms with her murder.

**Project Background:** Based in Wellington, the wardrobe department heard about the TDL from students on work experience. Discovering that digital printing was not limited only to sportswear-style fabrics, and could offer small meterages and fast turnaround, made it an important technology to explore.

Costuming for film has some very specific requirements. Many costumes must be made in small runs of multiples – these will be adjusted to fit a range of filming needs, such as fitted for stunt doubles, or to allow for water scenes etc, or 'broken down' and aged to indicate the passage of time, or to make the garment look like part of a character, rather than 'brand new'. Costumes can be vital to character development but must also be comfortable for the actors to wear, particularly under hot studio lighting.

**Project Methodology:** The 1970s setting gave the costume production team some specific problems. Crucial to the look of the period were the synthetic fabrics and distinctive colour palette of the time.



To begin this process, the costume team had Pantone colour charts printed onto swatches of suitable fabric. Prints were often sourced from original garments, but digital printing allowed the team to test variations, particularly in the intensity of a colour when filmed.



Every costume went through a minimum of 2 processes – making up and breaking down. For the character of Mr Harvey, 9 sets of pyjamas were printed from dark to light to test different degrees of fading, alongside a range of patterns to test lighting conditions.

**Learning outcomes:** Ideally, Kate would like to be working in the same city as a facility like the TDL. “Communication and turnaround are key. On one skivvy, the flower print washed off, due to a random, unmentioned fibre in the fabric sample. Prototyping is crucial, and ideally, we’d have months to do it all. But there is this constant time pressure, and there is the reality of another working business closing on weekends.”

With this in mind, Kate has already begun experimenting with the whole knit machinery at the TDL. She’s also intrigued by the rapid prototyping machine, also based at AUT and more usually used in product design. “We often have to have buttons or buckles specially cast. You never know how a director will introduce a character, it could be their foot on a step or the back of their neck. Every aspect of a garment tells the story of that character.”



Kate foresees that digital printing will allow the costume team to work in a certain level of breakdown into the image files, incorporating watermarking, dirt etc. “People are happy to spend a lot of money on CGI [computer generated images], but they don’t always understand the level of workmanship in wardrobe and the cost of that. Cutting time spent in breakdown is always good.”

**Feedback:** “The digital printing allowed us a lot more freedom. It meant we could have more ambitious ideas for what we could do, but still control the process,” says Kate. “We could take a print from a nightie, that would be lost on screen and put it on a dressing gown. In the book and in the script, it states that orange is the lead character’s favourite colour. If a print was right, we could change the colourway. There’s lots of really exciting places this could go.”

