

# TEXTILE + DESIGN LAB

Case study number: 08/2011

Project Title: Digitally printed leather for Spartacus TV production

TDL Partner: Pacific Renaissance

Contact: Sara Beale, Costume Buyer

Project Period: March 2010 – August 2011

**Partner Profile:** Pacific Renaissance (established 1979) is a film and TV production company with its origins in America but now operating predominantly from Auckland, with a studio in Mount Wellington. Executive producer Rob Tapert, well known for the popular television programmes Hercules and Xena: Warrior Princess, lives in New Zealand and is currently producing the Spartacus TV series.

Barbara Darragh is an award winning New Zealand costume designer currently working for Pacific Renaissance. She has worked on many well known films including River Queen by Greenstone Films, Peter Jackson's comedy horror The Frighteners, Hercules and Xena: Warrior Princess. She has won many awards and is currently heading the costume design team for the Spartacus TV production.

Costume buyer Sara Beale has a background in costume design and sourcing. Sara is currently working at Pacific Renaissance with Barbara Darragh, sourcing materials and organising elements of costume design manufacture for the Spartacus production.

**Project Background:** Pacific Renaissance previously worked with the TDL for some of its knitwear requirements. The current Spartacus costume design is based on ancient Roman garb, circa 100 BC, and its initial range of leather costumes were made using vintage leather. This material ran out of supply but identical copies of these costumes were required, and in some instances, multiple versions of the same costume needed for fight scenes, doubles' use etc). Costume buyer Sara Beale contacted the TDL to help with these special production requirements.

**Project Description:** The project involved digitally printing leather to match photos of existing leather costumes and digitally printing linen fabrics for other Spartacus costumes. The digital printing had to match the textile material, garment and design scale, and colour pallet of the originals as closely as possible.

**Project Methodology:** Sara arranged for PCL Imaging to take high resolution scans of the costumes so TDL staff could extract the design and colour match the prints to the originals. Colour charts were printed on the leather and linen to identify the range of colours that Pacific Renaissance could expect to achieve on each of these materials. After test printing to determine that the selected colours were satisfactory, full size piece lengths were printed and the resultant costumes were embellished by Pacific Renaissance with extra ink and embroidery to give a more three dimensional appearance.

**Feedback:** A major requirement of Pacific Renaissance was a fast turnaround, sometimes within a few days, which the TDL was able

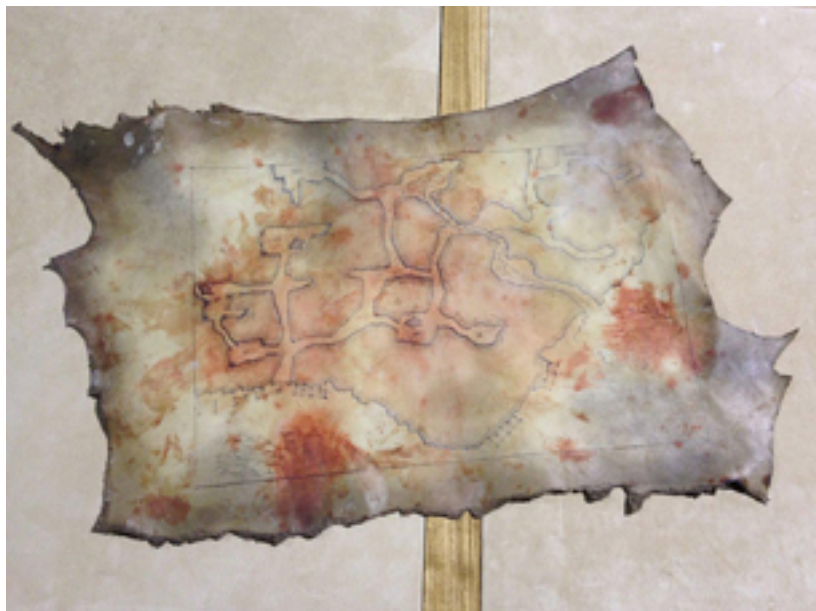
to achieve. The costume brief for the Spartacus production demanded clothing applicable to the era (around 100 BC), which in turn demanded specific textile material requirements. In most cases these were achieved and/or adapted. From a costume buyer's perspective, a larger range of digitally printable fabrics to select from would have been beneficial. Pacific Renaissance appreciated the TDL's flexibility in adapting to the company's rigorous scheduling requirements. Sara complimented the friendly professionalism of the TDL staff and Pacific Renaissance will be looking to work with the lab again in the near future.

**Insights:** While the film industry has large budgets it also has very detailed production requirements and extremely demanding schedules. Industry staff are often freelancers working on and off for months at a time, which generally means that the costume department has limited time available for extensive research and testing. Briefs may alter at short notice and costumes are often required urgently. The nature of digital textile printing is well suited to the demands of this type of production and offers some real advantages in terms of the accurate production of costume designs especially where multiple versions are required.

**Conclusion:** The 'on demand' nature of digital textile printing has real advantages for costume production for film and television. Whilst the TDL carries a range of PFDP (prepared for digital print) fabrics that are largely aimed at apparel and home ware applications, there would be some value in extending this range to include a wider range of sample fabrics that might be useful for costuming. The use of digital printing and electronic knitting for costume production is recognised by the TDL as an area of potential growth with opportunities for further research into new applications and effects.

**Documentation:** Barbara Darragh biography: <http://www.nzonscreen.com/person/barbara-darragh?tab=biography>

**Images:**



*Image courtesy of Pacific Renaissance*